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DISCOURSES

ON

VARIOUS SUBJECTS,

BY

REV. ORVILLE DEWEY.

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TO THE FIRST CHURCH AND CONGREGATION IN

NEW BEDFORD,

THESE DISCOURSES,

ORIGINALLY PREPARED FOR THEIR BENEFIT,

ARE AFFECTIONATELY DEDICATED,

BY THEIR

LATE PASTOR AND EVER OBLIGED FRIEND,

THE AUTHOR.

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PREFACE

Cut off by ill health from a pastoral connection most interesting to him, the Author of the following Discourses was desirous of leaving among the people of his late charge, some permanent record of the interest he has taken in them, of the words he has spoken to them, and of the satisfaction with which he has met them, from Sabbath to Sabbath, to meditate on the great themes of religion—a satisfaction, let him add, not marred by one moment's disagreement, nor by the altered eye of one individual, during the ten year's continuance of that most delicate and affecting relationship. Circumstances, he has thought, may justify a publication of this nature—friendship and kindness may give it value and utility in their limited circle, though it may not be destined to excite any interest in a wider sphere; and he ventures, therefore, to hope, that this volume may not be entirely useless nor uninteresting to that portion of the religious community generally, with which he has the happiness to be personally acquainted. To his friends—and he cannot deny himself the pleasure of including the few that he claims to be of that number in England—he offers this collection of Discourses, with as much anxiety as he ought, perhaps, to feel for any human opinion, but with an equal reliance on their candour and kindness.

New-York, Feb. 24, 1835.

DISCOURSE I.

ON HUMAN NATURE.

PSALM VIII. 4. 5. WHAT IS MAN, THAT THOU ART MINDFUL OF HIM? AND THE SON OF MAN THAT THOU VISITEST HIM? FOR THOU HAST MADE HIM A LITTLE LOWER THAN THE ANGELS, AND HAST CROWNED HIM WITH GLORY AND HONOR

You will observe, my brethren, that in these words, two distinct, and in a degree, opposite views are given, of human nature. It is represented, on the one hand, as weak and low, and yet on the other, as lofty and strong. At one moment it presents itself to the inspired writer as poor, humble, depressed, and almost unworthy of the notice of its Maker. But in the transition of a single sentence, we find him contemplating this same being, man, as exalted, glorious, and almost angelic. "When I consider thy heavens, the work of thy fingers, the moon and the stars, which thou hast ordained," he says, "what is man that thou art mindful of him?" And yet, he adds, "thou hast made him, a little lower than the angels, and hast crowned him with glory and honor."

But do not these contrasted statements make up, in fact, the only true view of human nature? Are they not conformable to the universal sense of mankind, and to the whole tenor and spirit of our religion?

Whenever the human character is pourtrayed in colors altogether dark, or altogether bright; whenever the misanthrope pours out his scorn upon the wickedness and baseness of mankind, or the enthusiast lavishes his admiration upon their virtues, do we not always feel that there needs to be some qualification; that there is something to be said on the other side?

Nay more; do not all the varying representations of human nature imply their opposites? Does not virtue—according to our idea of it, according to the universal idea of it, according to the scriptural representation of it,—imply, that sins and sinful passions are struggled with, and overcome? And, on the contrary, does not sin in its very nature, imply that there are high and sacred powers, capacities, and affections, which it violates?

In this view it appears to me, that all unqualified disparagement, as well as praise, of human nature, carries with it, its own refutation; and it is to this point that I wish to invite your particular attention in the following discourse. Admitting all that can be asked on this subject by the strongest assertors of human depravity; admitting every thing, certainly, that can be stated as a matter of fact; admitting that men are as bad as they are said to be, and substantially believing it too, I shall argue that the conclusion to be drawn is entirely the reverse of that which usually is drawn. I shall argue, that the most strenuous, the most earnest and indignant, objections against human nature imply the strongest concessions to its constitutional worth. I say then, and repeat, that objection here carries with it, its own refutation; that the objector concedes

much, very much, to human nature, by the very terms with which he inveighs against it.

It is not my sole purpose, however, to present any abstract or polemic argument. Rather let me attempt to offer some general and just views of human nature; and for this purpose rather than for the sake of controversy, let me pass in brief review before you, some of the specific and disparaging opinions, that have prevailed in the world concerning it—those for instance, of the philosopher, and the theologian.

In doing this, my purpose is, to admit that much of what they say, is true; but to draw from it an inference quite different from theirs. I would admit on one hand, that there is much evil in the human heart, but at the same time, I would balance this view, and blend it with others that claim to be brought into the account. On the one hand, I would admit and enforce the objection of much and mournful evil in the world; but, on the other, I would prevent it from pressing on the heart, as a discouraging and dead weight of reprobation and obloquy.

It may appear to you that the opinions which I have selected for our present consideration are, each of them, brought into strange company; and yet they have an affinity which may not at once be suspected. It is singular indeed, that we find in the same ranks and waging the same war against all human self-respect, the most opposite descriptions of persons; the most religious with the most irreligious, the most credulous with the most sceptical If any man supposes that it is his superior goodness or purer faith, which leads him to think so badly of his fellow-men and of their very nature, he needs to be reminded that vicious

and dissolute habits almost invariably and unerringly lead to the same result. The man who is taking the downward way, with almost every step you will find, thinks worse of his nature and his species; till he concludes, if he can, that he was made only for sensual indulgence, and that all idea of a future, intellectual, and immortal existence, is a dream. And so if any man thinks that it is owing to his spirituality and heavenly mindedness, that he pronounces the world so utterly corrupt, a mere mass of selfishness and deceit; he may be admonished, that nobody so thoroughly agrees with him as the man of the world, the shrewd, over-reaching, and knavish practicer on the weakness or the wickedness of his fellows. And in the same way, the strict and high-toned theologian, as he calls himself, may unexpectedly find himself in company with the sceptical and scornful philosopher. No men have ever more bitterly decried and vilified human nature, than the Infidel philosophers of the last century. They contended that man was too mean and contemptible a creature, to be the subject of such an interposition as that recorded in the Gospel.

I. But I am to take up in the first place, and more in detail, the objection of the sceptical philosopher.

The philosopher says, that man is a mean creature; not so much a degraded being, as he is originally, a poor insignificant creature; an animal, some grades above others perhaps, but still an animal; for whom, to suppose the provision of infinite mercy and of immortality to be made, is absurd.

It is worth noticing, as we pass, and I therefore remark, the striking connection which is almost always

found, between different parts of every man's belief or skepticism. I never knew one to think wrongly about God, but he very soon began to think wrongly about man: or else the reverse is the process, and it is not material, which. The things always go together. He who conceives of the Almighty as a severe, unjust and vindictive being, will regard man as a slave, will *make* him the slave of *superstition*, will take a sort of superstitious pleasure or merit in magnifying his wickednesss or unworthiness. And he who thinks meanly of human nature, will think coldly and distrustfully of the Supreme Being, will think of him as withdrawing himself to a sublime distance from such a nature. In other words, he who does not take the Christian view, and has no apprehension of the infinite love of God, will not believe that he has made man with such noble faculties, or for such noble ends, as we assert. The discussion proposed is obviously, even in this view, one of no trifling importance.

Let us, then, proceed to the objection of our philosopher. He says, I repeat, that man is a mean creature, fit only for the earth on which he is placed, fit for no higher destination than to be buried in its bosom, and there to find his end. The philosopher rejects what he calls the theologian's dream, about the fall. He says that man needed no fall in order to be a degraded creature; that he is, and was, always and originally, a degraded creature; a being not fallen from virtue, but incapable of virtue; a being, not corrupted from his innocence, but one who never possessed innocence; a being never of heaven, but a being only of earth, and sense, and appetite, and never fit for any thing better.

Now let us go at once to the main point in argument, which is proposed to be illustrated in this discourse. What need, I ask, of speaking of human debasement, in such indignant or sneering tones, if it is the real and only nature of man? There is nothing to blame or scorn in man, if he is naturally such a poor and insignificant creature. If he was made only for the senses and appetites, what occasion, I pray, for any wonder or abuse, that he is sensual and debased? Why waste invectives on such a being? The truth is, that this zealous depreciation of human nature betrays a consciousness, that it is not so utterly worthless, after all. It is no sufficient reply to say, that this philosophic scorn has been aroused by the extravagance of human pretensions. For if these pretensions were utterly groundless, if the being who aspired to virtue were fit only for sensation, or if the being whose thoughts swelled to the great hope of immortality, were only a higher species of the animal creation, and must share its fate—if this were true, his pretensions could justly create only a feeling of wonder, or of sadness.

We might say much to rebut the charge of the philosopher; so injurious to the soul, so fatal to all just self-respect, so fatal to all elevated virtue and devotion. We might say that the most ordinary tastes and the most trifling pursuits of man carry, to the observant eye, marks of the nobler mind. We might say that vain trifling, and that fleeting, dying pleasure, does not satisfy the immortal want; and that toil does not crush the soul, that the body cannot weigh down the spirit to its own drudgery. We might ask our proud reasoner, moreover whence the moral and

metaphysical philosopher obtains the facts with which he speculates, and argues, and builds up his admirable theory? And our skeptic must answer, that the metaphysical and moral philosopher goes to human nature; that he goes to it in its very attitudes of toil and its free actings of passion, and thence takes his materials and his form, and his living charm of representation, which delight the world. We might say still more. We might say that all there is of vastness and grandeur and beauty in the world, lies in the conception of man; that the immensity of the universe, as we term it, is but the reach of his imagination—that immensity in other words is but the image of his own idea; that there is no eternity to him, but that which exists in his own unbounded thought; that there is no God to man, but what has been conceived of in his own capacious and unmeasured understanding.

These things we might say; but I will rather meet the objector on his own ground, confident that, I may triumph even there. I take up the indignant argument, then. I allow that there is much weight and truth in it, though it brings me to a different conclusion. I feel that man is, in many respects and in many situations, and above all, compared with what he should be, that man is a mean creature. I feel it, as I should, if I saw some youth of splendid talents and promise plunging in, at the door of vice and infamy. Yes, it *is* meanness, for a MAN—who stands in the presence of his God and among the sons of heaven—it is meanness in him to play the humble part of sycophant before his fellows—to fawn and flatter, to make his very soul a slave, barely to gain from that fellow man

his smile, his nod, his hand—his favour, his vote, his patronage. It is meanness for a *man*—to prevaricate and falsify, to sell his conscience for advantage, to barter his soul for gain, to give his noble brow to the smiting blush of shame, or his cheek to the deadly paleness of convicted dishonesty. Yes, it is a degradation unutterable, for a man to steep his soul in gross, sensual, besotting indulgence; to live for this, and in this one, poor, low sensation to shut up the mind with all its boundless range; to sink to a debasement more than beastly; below where an animal can go. Yes, all this, and much beside this is meanness; but why, now I ask—why do we speak of it thus, unless it is because we speak of a being who might have put on such a nobility of soul, and such a loftiness and independence, and spiritual beauty, and glory, as would fling rebuke upon all the hosts of sin and temptation, and cast dimness upon all the splendour of the world?

It may be proper under the head of philosophical objections to take notice of the celebrated maxim of Rochefoucauld; since it is among the written, and has as good a title as others, to be among the philosophic objections. This maxim is, that we take a sort of pleasure in the disappointments and miseries of others, and are pained at their good fortune and success. If this maxim were intended to fix upon mankind the charge of pure, absolute, disinterested malignity, and if it could be sustained, it would be fatal to my argument. If I believed this, I should believe not only in total, but in diabolical depravity. And, I am aware, that the apologists for human nature, receiving the maxim in this light, have usually contented themselves with indignantly denying its truth. I shall, how-

ever, for myself take different ground. I suppose, and I admit, that the maxim is true, to a certain extent. Yet I deny that the feelings on which it is founded, are malignant. They may be selfish, they may be bad; but they are not malicious and diabolical. But let us explain. It should be premised, that there is nothing wrong in our desiring the goods and advantages of life, provided the desire be kept within proper bounds. Suppose, then that you are pursuing the same object with your neighbour,—a situation, an office, for instance, and suppose that he succeeds. His success, at the first disclosure of it to you, will, of course, give you a degree of pain; and for this reason: it immediately brings the sense of your own disappointment. Now it is not wrong perhaps, that you do regret your own failure; it is probably unavoidable that you should. You feel perhaps that you need, or deserve the appointment, more than your rival. You cannot help, therefore, on every account, regretting that he has obtained it. It does not follow that you wish him any less happy. You may make the distinction in your own mind. You may say—"I am glad he is happy; but I am sorry he has the place; I wish he could be as happy in some other situation." Now, all this, so far from being malignant, is scarcely selfish; and even when the feeling, in a very bad mind, is altogether selfish, yet it is very different from a malignant pain, at another's good fortune. But now, let us extend the case a little, from immediate rivalship, to that general competition of interests, which exists in society—a competition which the selfishness of men makes to be far more than is necessary, and conceives to be far greater than it is. There is an

erroneous idea, or imagination, shall I call it—and certainly it is one of the moral delusions of the world, that something gained by another, is something lost to one's self: and hence the feeling, before described, may arise at almost any indifferent instance of good fortune. But it always rises in this proportion:—it is stronger, the nearer the case comes to direct competition. You do not envy a rich man in China, nor a great man in Tartary. But if envy, as it has been sometimes called, were pure malignity, a man should be sorry that any body is happy, that any body is fortunate or honoured in the world. But this is not true; it does not apply to human nature. If you ever feel pain at the successes or acquisitions of another, it is when they come into comparison or contrast with your own failures or deficiencies. You feel that those successes or acquisitions might have been your own; you regret, and perhaps rightly, that they are not; and then, you insensibly slide into the very wrong feeling of regret, that they belong to another. This is envy; and it is sufficiently base; but it is not purely malicious, and it is, in fact, the perversion of a feeling, originally capable of good and valuable uses.

But I must pursue the skeptical philosopher a step farther—into actual life. The term, philosopher, may seem to be but ill applied here; but we have probably, all of us known or heard those, who, pretending to have a considerable *knowledge of the world*, if not much other knowledge, take upon them with quite an air of philosophic superiority, to pronounce human nature nothing but a mass of selfishness; and to say, that this mass, whenever it is refined, is only refined into luxury and licentiousness, duplicity and knavery.

Some simple souls they suppose there may be in the retired corners of the earth, that are walking in the chains of mechanical habit or superstitious piety, who have not the knowledge to understand, nor the courage to seek, what they want. But the moment they do act freely, they act, says our objector, upon the selfish principle. And this he maintains, is the principle, which, in fact, governs the world. Nay more, he avers, that it is the only reasonable and sufficient principle of action; and freely confesses that it is his own.

Let me ask you here to keep distinctly in view the ground, which the objector now assumes. There are talkers against human virtue, who never think however of going to this length; men in fact, who are a great deal better than their theory; whose example, indeed, refutes their theory. But there are worse objectors, and worse men; vicious and corrupt men; sensualists; sensualists in philosophy, and in practice alike; who would gladly believe all the rest of the world as bad as themselves. And these are objectors, I say, who like the objections before stated, refute themselves.

For who is this small philosopher, that smiles, either at the simplicity of all honest men, or at the simplicity of all honest defenders of them? He is, in the first place, a man who stands up before us, and has the face to boast, that he is himself without principle. No doubt, he thinks other men as bad as himself. A man necessarily, perhaps, judges the actions of other men by his own feelings. He has no other interpreter. The honest man, therefore, will often presume honesty in another; and the generous man, generosity. And so

the selfish man can see nothing around him but selfishness; and the knave, nothing but dishonesty; and he who never felt any thing of a generous and self-devoting piety, who never bowed down in that holy and blessed worship, can see in prayer nothing but the offering of selfish fear,—in piety, nothing but a slavish superstition.

In the next place; this sneerer at all virtue and piety, not only imagines others to be as destitute of principle as himself, but, to some extent, he makes them such, or makes them seem such. His eye of pride chills every goodly thing it looks upon. His breath of scorn blights every generous virtue where it comes. His supple and crafty hand puts all men upon their guard. They become like himself, for the time; they become more crafty while they deal with him. How shall any noble aspiration, any high and pure thoughts, any benevolent purposes, any sacred and holy communing, venture into the presence of the proud and selfish scorner of all goodness! It has been said, that the letters your friends write to you, will show their opinion of your temper and tastes. And so it is, to a certain extent, with conversation.

But in the third place; where, let us ask, has this man studied human nature? Lord Chesterfield observes—and the observation is worthy of a man who never seems to have looked beneath the surface of any thing—that the Court and the Camp are the places, in which a knowledge of mankind is to be gained. And we may remark, that it is from two fields not altogether dissimilar, that our skeptic about virtue always gains his knowledge of mankind: I mean, from fashion and business; the two most artificial spheres of active

life. Our objector has witnessed heartless civilities, and imagines that he is acquainted with the deep fountains of human nature. Or, he has been out into the paths of business, and seen men girt up for competition, and acting in that artificial state of things which trade produces; and he imagines that he has witnessed the free and unsophisticated workings of the human heart; he supposes that the laws of trade, are also the laws of human affection. He thinks himself deeply read in the book of the human heart, that unfathomable mystery, because he is acquainted with notes and bonds, with cards and compliments.

How completely, then, is this man disqualified from judging of human nature! There *is* a power, which few possess, which none have attained in perfection; a power to unlock the retired, the deeper, and nobler sensibilities of men's minds, to draw out the hoarded and hidden virtues of the soul, to open the fountains which custom and ceremony and reserve have sealed up: it is a power, I repeat, which few possess—how evidently does our objector possess it not—and yet without some portion of which, no man should think himself qualified to study human nature. Men know but little of each other, after all; but little know how many good and tender affections are suppressed and kept out of sight, by diffidence, by delicacy, by the fear of appearing awkward or ostentatious, by habits of life, by education, by sensitiveness, and even by strong sensibility, that sometimes puts on a hard and rough exterior for its own check or protection. And the power that penetrates all these barriers, must be an extraordinary one. There must belong to it charity, and kindness, and forbearance, and sagacity, and fideli-

ty to the trust which the opening heart reposes in it But how peculiarly, I repeat, how totally devoid of this power of opening and unfolding the real character of his fellows, must be the scoffer at human nature!

I have said that this man gathers his conclusions from the most formal and artificial aspects of the world. He never could have drawn them from the holy retreats of domestic life—to say nothing of those deeper privacies of the heart of which I have just been speaking;—he never could have drawn his conclusions from those family scenes, where unnumbered, nameless, minute, and indescribable sacrifices are daily made, by thousands and ten thousands all around us; he never could have drawn them, from the self-devoting mother's cares, or from the grateful return, the lovely assiduity and tenderness of filial affection; he never could have derived his contemptuous inference, from the sick-room, where friendship, in silent prayer, watches and tends its charge. No: he dare not go out from our dwellings, from our temples, from our hospitals,—he dare not tread upon the holy places of the land, the high places, where the devout have prayed, and the brave have died; and proclaim, that, patriotism is a visionary sentiment, and piety, a selfish delusion, and charity, a pretence, and virtue, a name!

II. But it is time that we come now, to the objection of the Theologian. And I go at once to the single and strong point of his objection. The Theologian says that human nature is bad and corrupt. Now, taking this language in the practical and popular sense, I find no difficulty in agreeing with the Theologian. And, indeed, if he would confine himself—leaving vague and general declamation and technical phraseology—

if he would confine himself to facts;—if he would confine himself to a description of actual bad qualities and dispositions in men, I think he could not well go too far. Nay more, I am not certain that any Theologian's description so far as it is of this nature, has gone deep enough into the frightful mass of human depravity. For it requires an acute perception, that is rarely possessed, and a higher and holier conscience, perhaps, than belongs to any, to discover, and to declare *how* bad, and degraded and unworthy a being, a *bad man* is. I confess that nothing would beget in me a higher respect for a man, than a real—not a theological and factitious—but a real and deep sense of human sinfulness and unworthiness; of the mighty wrong which man does to himself, to his religion and to his God, when he yields to the evil and accursed inclinations that find place in him. This moral indignation is not half strong enough in those who profess to talk the most about human depravity. And the objection to them is, not that they feel too much or speak too strongly, about the actual wickedness, the actual and distinct sins of the wicked; but they speak too generally and vaguely of human wickedness, that they speak with too little discrimination to every man as if he were a murderer or a monster, that they speak in fine too argumentatively, and too much if I may say so, with a sort of argumentative satisfaction, as if they were glad that they could make this point so strong.

I know, then, and admit, that men, and all men, more or less, are, alas! sinful and bad. I know that the catalogue of human transgressions is long, and dark, and mournful. The words, pride, and envy, and anger, and selfishness, and base indulgence, are words of

lamentation. They are words, that should make a man weep when he pronounces them, and most of all when he applies them to himself, or to his fellow-men.

But what now is the inference from all this? Is it, that man is an utterly debased, degraded, and contemptible creature?—that there is nothing in him to be revered, or respected?—that the human heart presents nothing to us but a mark for cold and blighting reproach? Without wishing to assert any thing paradoxical, it seems to me that the very reverse is the inference.

I should reason thus upon this point. I should say; it must be a noble creature that can so offend. I should say; there must be a contrast of light and shade, to make the shade so deep. It *is* no ordinary being, surely—it is a being of conscience, of moral powers and glorious capacities, that calls from us, such intense reproach and indignation. We never so arraign the animal creation. The very power of sinning is a lofty and awful power! It is, in the language of our holiest poet, "the excess of glory obscured." Neither is it a power standing alone. It is not a solitary, unqualified, diabolical power of evil; a dark, and cold abstraction of wickedness. No, it is clothed with other qualities. No, it has dread attendants—attendants, I had almost said, that dignify even the wrong. A waiting conscience, visitings—Oh! visitings of better thoughts, calls of honour and self respect, come to the sinner; terrific admonition whispering on his secret ear; prophetic warning pointing him to the dim and veiled shadows of future retribution; and the all-penetrating, all-surrounding idea of an avenging God, are present with him: and the right arm of the felon and the trans-

gressor is lifted up, amidst lightnings of conviction and thunderings of reproach. I can tremble at such a being as this; I can pity him; I can weep for him; but I cannot scorn him.

The very words of condemnation which we apply to sin, are words of comparison. When we describe the act of the transgressor as mean, for instance, we recognise, I repeat, the nobility of his nature; and when we say, that his offence is a degradation, we imply a certain distinction. And so *to do wrong* implies a noble power—the very power which constitutes the glory of heaven—the *power to do right.* And thus it is, as I apprehend, that the inspired Teachers speak of the wickedness and unworthiness of man. They seem to do it under a sense of his better capacities and higher distinction. They speak as if he had wronged himself. And when they use the words ruin and perdition, they announce, in affecting terms, the *worth* of that which is reprobate and lost. Paul when speaking of his transgressions says,—"not I, but the sin, that dwelleth in me." There was a better nature in him, that resisted evil, though it did not always successfully resist. And we read of the Prodigal Son,—in terms which have always seemed to me of the most affecting import—that when he came to the sense of his duty, he "came—*to himself.*" Yes, the sinner is beside himself; and there is no peace, no reconciliation of his conduct to his nature, till he returns from his evil ways. Shall we not say, then, that his nature demands virtue and rectitude to satisfy it?

True it is, and I would not be one, to weaken nor obscure the truth, that man is sinful; but he is not

satisfied with sinning. Not his conscience only, but his wants, his natural affections, are not satisfied. He pays deep penalties for his transgressions. And these sufferings proclaim a higher nature. The pain, the disappointment, the dissatisfaction, that wait on an evil course, show that the human soul was not made to be the instrument of sin, but its lofty avenger. The desolated affections, the haggard countenance, the pallid and sunken cheek, the sighings of grief, proclaim that there are ruins indeed, but they proclaim, that something noble has fallen into ruin—proclaim it by signs mournful, yet venerable, like the desolations of an ancient temple, like its broken walls, and falling columns, and the hollow sounds of decay that sink down heavily among its deserted recesses.

The sinner, I repeat it, is a sufferer. He seeks happiness in low and unworthy objects—that is his sin: but he does not find it there—and that is his glory. No, he does not find it there: he returns disappointed and melancholy; and there is nothing on earth so eloquent as his grief. Read it in the pages of a Byron and a Burns. There is nothing in literature so touching as these lamentations of noble but erring natures, in the vain quest of a happiness which sin and the world can never give. The sinner is often dazzled by earthly fortune and pomp, but it is in the very midst of these things, that he sometimes most feels their emptiness; that his higher nature most feels that it is solitary and unsatisfied. It is in the giddy whirl of frivolous pursuits and amusements, that his soul oftentimes is sick and weary with trifles and vanities: that "he says of laughter, it is mad; and of mirth, what doeth it?"

And yet it is not bare disappointment, nor the mere destitution of happiness caused by sin,—it is not these alone that give testimony to a better nature. There is a higher power that bears sway in the human heart. It is remorse—sacred, uncompromising remorse, that will hear of no selfish calculations of pain and pleasure, that *demands* to suffer, that, of all sacrifices on earth, save those of benevolence, brings the only willing victim. What lofty revenge does the abused soul thus take, for its offences: never, no, never, in all its anger, punishing another, as in its justice, it punishes itself!

Such, then, are the attributes that still dwell in the dark grandeur of the soul; the beams of original light, of which amidst its thickest darkness it is never shorn. That in which all the nobleness of earth resides, should not be *condemned* even, but with awe and trembling. It is our treasure; and if this is lost, all is lost. Let us take care, then, that we be not unjust. Man is not an angel; but neither is he a demon,—nor, a brute. The evil he does, is not committed with brutish insensibility, nor with diabolical satisfaction. And the evil, too, is often disguised under forms that do not, at once, permit him to see its real character. His affections become wrong, by excess; passions bewilder; semblances delude; interests ensnare; example corrupts. And yet no tyrant over men's thoughts, no unworthy seeker of their adulation, no pander for their guilty pleasures, could ever make the human heart, what he would. And in making it what he has, he has often found that he had to work with stubborn materials. No perseverance of endeavour, nor devices of ingenuity, nor depths of artifice, have ever equalled

those which are sometimes employed to corrupt the heart from its youthful simplicity and uprightness.

In endeavouring to state the views which are to be entertained of human nature, I have, at present, and before I reverse the picture, but one further observation to make. And that is on the spirit and tone with which it is to be viewed and spoken of. I have wished, even in speaking of its faults, to awaken a feeling of reverence and regret for it, such as would arise within us, on beholding a noble but mutilated statue, or the work of some divine architect in ruins, or some majestic object in nature, which had been marred by the rending of this world's elements and changes. Above all other objects, surely, human nature deserves to be regarded with these sentiments. The ordinary tone of conversation in allusion to this subject, the sneering remark on mankind, as a set of poor and miserable creatures, the cold and bitter severity, whether of philosophic scorn, or theological rancour, become no being; least of all, him who has part in this common nature. He, at least, should speak with consideration and tenderness. And if he must speak of faults and sins, he would do well to imitate an Apostle, and to tell these things, even weeping. His tone should be, that of forbearance and pity. His words should be recorded in a Book of Lamentations. "How is the gold become dim," he might exclaim in the words of an ancient lamentation—"how is the gold become dim, and the most fine gold changed! The precious sons of Zion, comparable to fine gold, how are they esteemed but as earthen vessels, the work of the hands of the potter!"

DISCOURSE II.

ON HUMAN NATURE.

PSALM VIII. 5. For thou hast made him a little lower than the angels, and hast crowned him with glory and honour.

I have endeavoured, in my last discourse, to show that the very objections which are usually brought against human nature, imply in the very fact, in the very spirit and tone of them, the strongest concessions to its worth. I shall now proceed to the direct argument in its favour. It is the constitutional worth of human nature that we have thus far considered rather than its moral worth, or absolute virtue. We have considered the indignant reproaches against its sin and debasement, whether of the philosopher or the theologian, as evidence of their own conviction, that it was made for something better. We have considered that moral constitution of human nature, by which it was evidently made not to be the slave of sin, but its conqueror.

Let us now proceed to take some account of its moral traits and acquisitions. I say its moral *traits* and acquisitions. For there are feelings of the human mind, which scarcely rise to the character of acquisitions, which are involuntary impulses; and yet which

possess a nature as truly moral, though not in as high a degree, as any voluntary acts of virtue. Such is the simple, natural love of excellence. It bears the same relation to moral effort, as spontaneous reason, does to reflection or logical effort: and what is spontaneous, in both cases, is the very foundation of the acquisitions that follow. Thus, the involuntary perception of a few axioms lies at the foundation of Mathematical science; and so from certain spontaneous impressions of truth, springs all knowledge; and in the same manner, our spontaneous moral impressions are the germs of the highest moral efforts.

Of these spontaneous impressions, I am to speak in the first place; and then to produce in favour of human nature the testimony of its higher and more confirmed virtues.

But I am not willing to enter upon this theme, without first offering a remark or two, to prevent any misconception of the purpose for which I again bring forward this discussion. It is not to bring to the altar at which I minister, an oblation of flattery to my fellow worshippers. It is not to make any man feel his moral dangers to be less, or to make him easier in reference to that solemn, spiritual trust that is committed to his nature; but the very contrary. It is not to make him think less of his sins, but more. It is not in fine to build up any one theological dogma, or to beat down another.

My view of the subject, if I may state it without presumption, is this—that there is a treasure in human nature of which most men are not conscious, and with which none are yet fully acquainted! If you had met in a retired part of the country with some rustic

youth, who bore in his character, the indications of a most sublime genius, and if you saw that he was ignorant of it, and that those around him were ignorant of it, you would look upon him with extreme, with enthusiastic interest, and you would be anxious to bring him into the light, and to rear him up to his proper sphere of distinction. This, may I be permitted to say, illustrates the view which I take of human nature. I believe that there is something in every man's heart upon which he ought to look as a found treasure; something upon which he ought to look with awe and wonder; something which should make him tremble when he thinks of sacrificing it to sin; something, also, to encourage and cheer him in every endeavour after virtue and purity. Far be it from me to say, that that something is confirmed goodness, or is the degree of goodness which is necessary to make him happy, here or hereafter; or, that it is something to rest upon, or to rely upon, in the anticipation of God's judgment. Still I believe that he who says there is *nothing* good in him, *no* foundation, no feeling of goodness, says what is not true, what is not just to himself, what is not just to his Maker's beneficence.

I will refer now, to those moral traits, to those involuntary moral impressions, of which I have already spoken.

Instances of this nature might undoubtedly be drawn from every department of social life; from social kindness, from friendship, from parental and filial love, from the feelings of spontaneous generosity, pity, and admiration, which every day kindles into life and warmth around us. But since these feelings are often

alleged to be of a doubtful character, and are so, indeed, to a certain extent; since they are often mixed up with interested considerations which lessen their weight in this argument, I am about to appeal to cases, which, though they are not often brought into the pulpit, will appear to you I trust to be excused, if not justified, by the circumstance that they are altogether apposite cases; cases that is to say, of disinterested feeling.

The world is inundated in this age, with a perfect deluge of fictitious productions. I look, indeed, upon the exclusive reading of such works, in which too many employ their leisure time, as having a very bad and dangerous tendency: but this is not to my purpose, at present. I only refer now to the well known extent and fascination of this kind of reading, for the purpose of putting a single question. I ask, what is the moral character of these productions? Not high enough, certainly; but then I ask still more specifically, whether the preference is given to virtue or to vice, in these books; and to which of them, the feelings of the reader generally lean? Can there be one moment's doubt? Is not virtue usually held up to admiration, and are not the feelings universally enlisted in its favour? Must not the character of the leading personage in the story, to satisfy the public taste, be good, and is not his career pursued with intense interest to the end? Now, reverse the case. Suppose his character to be bad. Suppose him ungenerous, avaricious, sensual, debased. Would he then be admired? Would he then, enlist the sympathies even of the most frivolous reader? It is unnecessary to answer the question. Here, then, is a right

and virtuous feeling at work in the community: and it is a perfectly disinterested feeling. Here, I say, is a right and virtuous feeling, beating through the whole heart of society. Why should any one say, it is not a feeling; that it is conscience; that it is mere approbation. It *is* a feeling, if any thing is. There is intense interest; there are tears, to testify that it is a feeling.

If, then, I put such a book into the hands of any reader, and if he feels this, let him not tell me that there is nothing good in him. There may not be goodness, fixed, habitual goodness in him; but there is something good, out of which goodness may grow.

Of the same character are the most favourite popular songs and ballads. The chosen themes of these compositions are patriotism, generosity, pity, love. Now it is known that nothing sinks more deeply into the heart of nations; and yet these are their themes. Let me make the ballads of a people, some one has said, and let who will, make their laws; and yet he must construct them on these principles; he must compose them in praise of patriotism, honour, fidelity, generous sympathy, and pure love. I say, pure love. Let the passion be made a base one; let it be capricious, mercenary, or sensual, and it instantly loses the public sympathy: the song would be instantly hissed from the stage of the vilest theatre that ever was opened. No, it must be true-hearted affection, holding its faith and fealty bright and unsoiled, amidst change of fortunes, amidst poverty, and disaster, and separation, and reproach. The popular taste will hardly allow the affection to be as prudent as it ought to be. And when I listen to one of these popular

ballads or songs that tells—it may be not in the best taste—but which tells the thrilling tale of high, disinterested, magnanimous fidelity to the sentiments of the heart; that tells of pure and faithful affection, which no cold looks can chill, which no storms of misfortune can quench, which prefers simple merit to all worldly splendour; when I observe this, I say, I see a noble feeling at work; and that which many will pronounce to be silly, through a certain shamefacedness about their own sensibility, I regard as respectable, and honourable to human nature.

Now I say again, as I said before, let these popular compositions set forth the beauties of vice; let them celebrate meanness, parsimony, fraud or cowardice; and would they dwell, as they now do, in the habitations, and in the hearts, and upon the lips, of whole nations? What a disinterested testimony is this to the charms of virtue! What evidence that men feel those charms, though they may not be won by them to virtuous lives! The national songs of a people do not embrace cold sentiments: they are not sung or heard with cold approbation. They fire the breasts of millions. They draw tears from the eyes of ten thousand circles, that are gathered in the homes of human affection.

And the power of music, too, as a separate thing—the power of simple melody, I mean—lies very much, as it seems to me, in the sentiments and affections it awakens. There is a pleasure to the ear, doubtless; but there is a pleasure also, to the heart; and this is the greater pleasure. But what kind of pleasure is it? Does that melody which addresses the universal mind, appeal to vile and base passions? Is not the state into

which it naturally throws almost every mind favourable to gentle and kind emotions, to lofty efforts and heroic sacrifices? But if the human heart possessed no high nor holy feelings, if it were entirely alien to them, then the music which excites them, should excite them to voluptuousness, cruelty, strife, fraud, avarice, and to all the mean aims and indulgences of a selfish disposition.

Let not these illustrations—which are adopted, to be sure, partly because they are fitted to unfold a moral character where no credit has usually been given for it, and because, too, they present at once universal and disinterested manifestations of human feeling—let not these illustrations, I say, be thought to furnish an unsatisfactory inference, because they are drawn from the lighter actions of the human mind. The feeling in all these cases is not superficial nor feeble; and the slighter the occasion that awakens it, the stronger is our argument. If the leisure and recreations of men, yield such evidence of deep moral feeling, what are they not capable of, when armed with lofty purposes and engaged in high duties? If the instrument yields such noble strains, though incoherent and intermitted, to the slightest touch, what might not be done, if the hand of skill were laid upon it, to bring out all its sublime harmonies? Oh! that some powerful voice might speak to this inward nature—powerful as the story of heroic deeds, moving as the voice of song, arousing as the trumpet-call to honor and victory! My friends, if we are among those who are pursuing the sinful way, let us be assured that we know not ourselves yet; we have not searched the depths of our nature; we have not communed with its deepest wants; we

have not listened to its strongest and highest affections: if we had done all this, we could not abuse it as we do; nor could we neglect it as we do.

But it is time to pass from these instances of spontaneous and universal feeling, to those cases in which such feeling, instead of being occasional and evanescent, is formed into a prevailing habit and a consistent and fixed character; to pass from good affections, transient, uncertain, and unworthily neglected, to good men, who are permanently such, and worthy to be called such. Our argument from this source is more confined, but it gains strength by its compression within a narrower compass.

I shall not be expected here to occupy the time, with asserting or proving, that there are good men in the world. It will be more important to reply to a single objection under this head, which would be fatal if it were just, and to point to some characteristics of human virtue which prove its great and real worth. Let me however for a moment indulge myself in the simple assertion, of what every mind, not entirely misanthropic, must feel to be true. I say then that there are good men in the world: there are good men everywhere. There are men who are good for goodness' sake. In obscurity, in retirement, beneath the shadow of ten thousand dwellings, scarcely known to the world and never asking to be known, there are good men In adversity, in poverty, amidst temptations, amidst all the severity of earthly trials, there are good men, whose lives shed brightness upon the dark clouds that surround them. Be it true, if we must admit the sad truth, that many are wrong, and persist in being wrong; that many are false to every holy trust, and

faithless towards every holy affection; that many are estranged from infinite goodness; that many are coldly selfish and meanly sensual—yes, cold, and dead to every thing that is not wrapped up in their own little earthly interest, or more darkly wrapped up in the veil of fleshly appetites. Be it so; but I thank God, that is not all that we are obliged to believe. No, there are true hearts, amidst the throng of the false and the faithless. There are warm and generous hearts, which the cold atmosphere of surrounding selfishness never chills; and eyes, unused to weep for personal sorrow, which often overflow with sympathy for the sorrows of others. Yes, there are good men, and true men; I thank them; I bless them for what they are: I thank them for what they are to me. What do I say—why do I utter my weak benediction? God from on high, doth bless them, and he giveth his angels charge to keep them; and no where in the holy Record are there words more precious or strong, than those in which it is written that God loveth these righteous ones. Such men are there. Let not their precious virtues be distrusted. As surely and as evidently as some men have obeyed the calls of ambition and pleasure, so surely, and so evidently, have other men obeyed the voice of conscience, and "chosen rather to suffer with the people of God than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season." Why, every meek man suffers in a conflict keener far, than the contest for honour and applause. And there are such men, who amidst injury, and insult, and misconstruction, and the pointed finger, and the scornful lip of pride, stand firm in their integrity and allegiance to a loftier principle, and still their throbbing hearts in prayer, and hush

them to the gentle motions of kindness and pity. Such witnesses there are even in this bad world; signs that a redeeming work is going forward amidst its mournful derelictions; proofs that it is not a world forsaken of heaven; pledges that it will not be forsaken; tokens that cheer and touch every good and thoughtful mind, beyond all other power of earth to penetrate and enkindle it.

I believe, that what I have now said, is a most legitimate argument for the worth of human nature. As a matter of fact, it will not be denied that such beings as I have represented, there are. And I now further maintain, and this is the most material point in the argument, that such men—that good men, in other words—are to be regarded as the rightful and legitimate representatives of human nature. Surely, not man's sins but his virtues, not his failure but his success, should teach us what to think of his nature. Just as we should look, for their real character, to the productions nourished by a favourable soil and climate, and not to the same plants or trees, as they stand withered and stunted in a barren desert.

But here we are met with the objection before referred to. It is said that man's virtues come from God; and his *sins* only, from his own nature. And thus—for this is the result of the objection—from the estimate of what is human, all human excellence is at once cut off, by this fine discrimination of theological subtilty. Unreasonable as this seems to me—if the objector will forget his theology for one moment—I will answer it. I say, then, that the influence of the good spirit of God, does not destroy our natural powers, but guides them into a right direction;

that it does not create any thing unnatural, surely, nor supernatural in man, but what is suitable to his nature; that in fine, his virtues are as truly the voluntary put ting forth of his native powers, as his sins are. Else would his virtues have no worth. Human nature, in short, is the noble stock on which these virtues grow. With heaven's rain, and sunshine, and genial influence. do you say? Be it so; still they are no less human, and *show the stock* from which they spring. When you look over a grain-field, and see some parts more luxuriant than others, do you say, that they are of a different nature from the rest? And when you look abroad upon the world, do you think it right to take Tartars and Hottentots as specimens of the race? And why then shall you regard the worst of men, rather than the best, as samples of human nature and capability?

The way, then, is open for us to claim for human nature—however, that nature is breathed upon by heavenly influences—to claim for human nature, all the excellent fruits that have sprung from it. And they are not few; they are not small; they are not contemptible.

They have cost too much—if there were no other consideration to give them value—they have cost too much, to be thus estimated.

The true idea of human nature, is not, that it passively and spontaneously produces its destined results; but, that placed in a fearful contest between good and evil, it is *capable* of glorious exertions and attainments. Human virtue is the result of effort and patience, in circumstances that most severely try it. Human excellence is much of it gained at the expense

of self-denial. All the wisdom and worth in the world, are a struggle with ignorance and infirmity and temptation; often with sickness and pain. There is not an admirable character presented before you, but it has cost years, and years, of toil and watching and self-government to form it. You see the victor, but you forget the battle. And you forget it, for a reason that exalts and ennobles the fortitude and courage of the combatant. You forget it, because the conflict has been carried on, all silently, in his own bosom. You forget it, because no sound has gone forth, and no wreath of fame has awaited the conqueror.

And *what* has he gained?—to refer to but one more of the many views that might be urged—what has he gained? I answer, what is worth too much to be slightly estimated. The catalogue of human virtues is not brief nor dull. What glowing words do we involuntarily put into that record! with what feelings do we hallow it! The charm of youthful excellence, the strong integrity of manhood, the venerable piety of age; unsullied honour, unswerving truth, fidelity, magnanimity, self-sacrifice, martyrdom; ay, and the spirit of martyrdom in many a form of virtue—sacred friendship, with its disinterested toil, ready to die for those it loves; noble patriotism, slain in its high places, beautiful in death; holy philanthropy, that pours out its treasure and its life;—dear and blessed virtues of humanity! (we are ready to exclaim)—what human heart does not cherish you?—bright cloud that hath passed on with "the sacramental host of God's elect," through ages!—how dark and desolate but for you, would be this world's history!

My friends, I have spoken of the reality and worth

of virtue, and I have spoken of it as a part of human nature, not surely to awaken a feeling of pride, but to lead you and myself, to an earnest aspiration after that excellence, which embraces the chief welfare and glory of our nature. A cold disdain of our species, an indulgence of sarcasm, a feeling that is always ready to distrust and disparage every indication of virtuous principle, or an utter despair of the moral fortunes of our race, will not help the purpose in view, but must have a powerful tendency to hinder its accomplishment.

Unhappy is it, that any are left, by any possibility, to doubt the virtues of their kind! Let us do something to wipe away from the history of human life, that fatal reproach. Let us make that best of contributions to the stock of human happiness, an example of goodness that shall disarm such gloomy and chilling skepticism, and win men's hearts to virtue. I have received many benefits, from my fellow-beings. But no gift, in their power to bestow, can ever impart such a pure and thrilling delight, as one bright action, one lovely virtue, one character that shines with all the enrapturing beauty of goodness.

Who would not desire to confer such benefits on the world as these? Who would not desire to leave such memorials behind him? Such memorials have been left on earth; the virtues, of the departed, but for ever dear, hallow and bless many of our dwellings, and call forth tears that lose half their bitterness in gratitude and admiration. Yes, there are such legacies, and there are those on earth who have inherited them. Yes, there are men, poor men, whose parents have left them a legacy in their bare memory, that

they would not exchange—no, they would not exchange it, for boundless wealth. Let it be our care to bequeath to society and to the world, blessings like these. "The memorial of virtue," saith the wisdom of Solomon, "is immortal. When it is present, men take example from it; and when it is gone, they desire it; it weareth a crown, and triumpheth for ever."

DISCOURSE III.

ON THE WRONG WHICH SIN DOES TO HUMAN NATURE.

PROVERBS VIII. 36. He that sinneth against me wrongeth his own soul.

This is represented as the language of wisdom. The attribute of wisdom is personified throughout the chapter; and it closes its instructions with the declaration of our text: "he that sinneth against me, wrongeth his own soul." The theme, then, which, in these words, is obviously presented for our meditation, is the wrong which the sinner does to himself, to his nature, to his own soul.

He does a wrong, indeed, to others. He does them, it may be, deep and heinous injury. The moral offender injures society, and injures it in the most vital part. Sin is, to all the dearest interests of society, a desolating power. It spreads misery through the world. It brings that misery into the daily lot of millions. Yes, the violence of anger, the exactions of selfishness, the corrodings of envy, the coldness of distrust, the contests of pride, the excesses of passion, the indulgences of sense, carry desolation into the very bosom of domestic life; and the crushed and bleeding hearts of friends and kindred, or of a larger circle of the suffering and oppressed, are every where, wit-

nesses, at once, and victims, of the mournful prevalence of this great evil.

But all the injury, great and terrible as it is, which the sinner does or can inflict upon others, is not equal to the injury that he inflicts upon himself. The evil that he does, is, in almost all cases, the greater, the nearer it comes to himself; greater to his friends than to society at large; greater to his family, than to his friends; and so is it greater to himself, than it is to any other. Yes, it is in his own nature, whose glorious traits are dimmed and almost blotted out, whose pleading remonstrances are sternly disregarded, whose immortal hopes are rudely stricken down—it is in his own nature that he does a work so dark and mournful, and so fearful, that he ought to shudder and weep to think of it.

Does any one say "he is glad that it is so; glad that it is himself he injures most?" What a feeling, my brethren, of disinterested justice is that! How truly, may it be said, that there is something good even in bad men. Yes, doubtless, there are those, who in their remorse at an evil deed, would be glad if all the injury and suffering could be their own. I rejoice in that testimony. But does that feeling make it any less true,—does not that feeling make it more true, that such a nature is wronged by base and selfish passions? Or, because it is a man's self, because it is his own soul that he has most injured; because he has not only wronged others, but ruined himself, is his course any the less guilty, or unhappy, or unnatural?

I say, unnatural; and this is a point on which I wish to insist, in the consideration of that wrong which the moral offender does to himself. The sinner, I say, is

to be pronounced an unnatural being. He has cast off the government of those powers of his nature, which as being the loftiest, have the best right to reign over him—the government, that is to say, of his intellectual and moral faculties; and has yielded himself to meaner appetites. Those meaner appetites, though they belong to his nature, have no right, and he knows they have no right, to govern him. The rightful authority, the lawful sovereignty belongs, and he knows that it belongs, not to sense, but to conscience. To rebel against this, is to sin against nature. It is to rebel against nature's order. It is to rebel against the government that God has set up within him. It is to obey, not venerable authority, but the faction which his passions have made within him.

Thus violence and misrule are always the part of transgression. Nay, every sin—I do not mean now the natural and unavoidable imperfection of a weak and ignorant being,—but every wilful moral offence is a monstrous excess and excrescence in the mind, a hideous deformity, a loathsome disease, a destruction, so far as it goes, of the purposes for which our nature was made. As well might you say of the diseased plant or tree, which is wasting all its vigour on the growth of one huge and unsightly deformity, that it is in a natural condition. Grant that the natural powers of the plant or tree are converted, or rather perverted to this misuse, and help to produce this deformity; yet the deformity is not natural. Grant that sin is the possible, or supposable, or that it is the actual, nay, and in this world, the common, result of moral freedom. It has been argued, I know, that what is common, is natural; and grant that too. But sin, we

believe, is *not* common in the whole moral universe. It is not the common result of universal moral action. And it is evidently not the just and legitimate result; it is not the fair and natural result; it violates all moral powers and responsibilities. If the mechanism of a vast manufactory, were thrown into sudden disorder, the power which propels it,—and a power, if you please, which the artificer had placed in it,—might, indeed, spread destruction throughout the whole work; but would that be the natural course of things; the result for which the fabric was made? So passion, not in its natural state, but still natural passion, in its unnatural state of excess and fury, may spread disorder and destruction through the moral system; but wreck and ruin are not the proper order of any nature, whether material or moral.

The idea against which I am now contending, that sin is natural to us, and in fact, that nothing else is natural—this popular and prevailing idea is one, it seems to me, so fearful and fatal in its bearings—is one of such comprehensive and radical mischief, as to infect the religious state of all mankind, and to overshadow, almost with despair, the moral prospects of the world. There is no error, theological or moral, that appears to me, so destructive as this. There is nothing that lies so near the very basis of all moral reform and spiritual improvement as this.

If it were a matter of mere doctrine it would be of less consequence. But it is a matter of habitual feeling, I fear, and of deep-settled opinion. The world, alas! is not only in the sad and awful condition of being filled with sin, and filled with misery in consequence, but of thinking that this is the natural order of

things. Sin is a thing of course; it is taken for granted that it must exist very much in the way that it does; and men are every where easy about it: they are every where sinking into worldliness and vice as if they were acting out the principles of their moral constitution, and almost as if they were fulfilling the will of God. And thus it comes to pass, that that which should fill the world with grief and astonishment and horror, beyond all things else most horrible and lamentable, is regarded with perfect apathy as a thing natural and necessary. Why, my brethren, if but the animal creation were found, on a sudden, disobedient to the principles of *their* nature, if they were ceasing to regard the guiding instincts with which they are endowed, and were rushing into universal madness, the whole world would stand aghast at the spectacle. But multitudes in the rational creation, disobey a higher law and forsake a more sacred guidance; they degrade themselves below the beasts, or make themselves as entirely creatures of this world; they plunge into excess and profligacy; they bow down divine and immortal faculties to the basest uses: and there is no wonder, there is no horror, there is no consciousness of the wrong done to themselves. They say, "it is the natural course of things," as if they had solved the whole problem of moral evil. They say, "it is the way of the world," almost as if they thought it was the order of providence. They say, "it is what men are," almost as if they thought it was what men were designed to be. And thus ends their comment, and with it, all reasonable endeavour to make themselves better and happier.

If this state of prevailing opinion be as certainly

erroneous, as it is evidently dangerous, it is of the last importance that every resistance, however feeble, should be offered to its fatal tendencies. Let us therefore consider, a little more in detail, the wrong which sin does to human nature. I say then, that it does a wrong to every natural faculty and power of the mind.

Sin does a wrong to reason. There are instances, and not a few, in which sin, in various forms of vice and vanity, absolutely destroys reason. There are other and more numerous cases, in which it employs that faculty, but employs it in a toil most degrading to its nature. There is reasoning, indeed, in the mind of a miser; the solemn arithmetic of profit and loss. There is reasoning in the schemes of unscrupulous ambition; the absorbing and agitating intrigue for office or honour. There is reasoning upon the modes of sensual pleasure; and the whole power of a very acute mind is sometimes employed and absorbed, in plans, and projects, and imaginations of evil indulgence. But what an unnatural desecration is it, for reason, sovereign, majestic, all comprehending reason, to contract its boundless range to the measure of what the hand can grasp—to be sunk so low, as to idolize outward or sensitive good; to make its god, not indeed of wood or stone, but of a sense, or a nerve! What a prostration of immortal reason is it, to bend its whole power to the poor and pitiful uses, which sinful indulgence demands of it!

Sin is a kind of insanity. So far as it goes, it makes man an irrational creature: it makes him a fool. The consummation of sin is, ever, and in every form, the extreme of folly. And it is that most pitiable folly which is puffed up, with arrogance and self-sufficiency.

Sin degrades, it impoverishes, it beggars, the soul; and yet the soul in this very condition, blesses itself in its superior endowments and happy fortune. Yes, every sinner is a beggar: as truly as the most needy and desperate mendicant. He begs for a precarious happiness; he begs it of his possessions or his coffers, that cannot give it; he begs it of every passing trifle and pleasure; he begs it of things most empty and uncertain,—of every vanity, of every shout of praise in the vacant air; of every wandering eye he begs its homage: he wants these things, he wants them for happiness, he wants them to satisfy the craving soul; and yet he imagines that he is very fortunate; he accounts himself wise, or great, or honourable, or rich, increased in goods, and in need of nothing. The infatuation of the inebriate man, who is elated, and gay, just when he ought to be most depressed and sad, we very well understand. But it is just as true of every man that is intoxicated by any of his senses or passions, by wealth or honour or pleasure, that he is infatuated; that he has abjured reason.

What clearer dictate of reason is there than to prefer the greater good, to the lesser good. But every offender, every sensualist, every avaricious man, sacrifices the greater good,—the happiness of virtue and piety—for the lesser good, which he finds in his senses or in the perishing world. Nor, is this the strongest view of the case. He sacrifices the greater for the less, without any necessity for it. He might have both. He gives up heaven for earth, when in the best sense, he might, I repeat, have both. A pure mind can derive more enjoyment from this world, and from the senses, than an impure mind. This is true

even of the lowest senses. But there are other senses, besides these; and the pleasures of the epicure are far from equalling even in intensity, those which piety draws from the glories of vision, and the melodies of sound—ministers as they are of thoughts and feelings, that swell far beyond the measure of all worldly joy.

The love of happiness might properly be treated as a separate part of our nature, and I had intended, indeed, to speak of it distinctly—to speak of the meagre and miserable provision which unholy gratification makes for it; and yet more of the cruel wrong which is done to this eager and craving love of happiness. But as I have fallen on this topic, and find the space that belongs to me diminishing, I must content myself with a single suggestion.

What bad man ever desired that his *child* should be like himself? Vice is said to wear an alluring aspect; and many a heedless youth, alas! rushes into its embraces for happiness; but what vicious man, what corrupt and dissolute man, ever desired that his child should walk in his steps? And what a testimony is this, what a clear and disinterested testimony, to the unhappiness of a sinful course! Yes, it is the bad man that often feels an interest about the virtue of others, beyond all, perhaps, that good men feel—feels an intensity, an agony of desire for his children, that *they* may be brought up virtuously—that they may never, never be, such as he is!

How truly, and with what striking emphasis, did the venerable Cranmer reply, when told that a certain man had cheated him, "no, he has cheated himself." Every bad man, every dishonest man, every corrupt man, cheats himself of a good, far dearer than

any advantage that he obtains over his neighbour. Others he may injure, abuse, and delude; but, another thing is true, though commonly forgotten, and that is, that he deludes himself, abuses himself, injures himself, more than he does all other men.

In the next place, sin does a wrong to conscience. There is a conscience in every man, which is as truly a part of his nature, as reason or memory. The offender against this, therefore, violates no unknown law, nor impracticable rule. From the very teaching of his nature, he knows what is right, and he knows that he can do it; and his very nature, therefore, instead of furnishing him with apologies for wilful wrong, holds him inexcusable. Inexcusable, I am aware, is a strong word; and when I have looked at mankind, and seen the ways in which they are instructed, educated and influenced, I have been disposed to feel as if there were palliations. But on the other hand, when I consider how strong is the voice of nature in a man, how sharp and piercing is the work of a restraining and condemning conscience, how loud and terrible is its remonstrance, what a peculiar, what a heaven-commissioned anguish it sometimes inflicts upon the guilty man; I am compelled to say, despite of all bad teaching, and bad influence, "this being is utterly inexcusable." For, I repeat it, there is a conscience in men. I cannot admit that human nature ever chooses sin as such. It seeks for good, for gratification, indeed. But take the vilest man that lives; and if it were so, that he could obtain the gratification he seeks—be it property or sensual pleasure —that he could obtain it, honestly and innocently, he would greatly prefer it, on such terms. This shows

that there is a conscience in him. But he *will* have the desired gratification. And to obtain it, he sets his foot upon that conscience, and crushes it down to dishonour and agony, worse than death. Ah! my brethren, we who sit in our closets, talk about vice, and dishonesty, and bloody crime, and draw dark pictures of them—cold and lifeless, though dark pictures. But we little know, perhaps, of what we speak. The heart, all conscious and alive to the truth, would smile in bitterness and derision, at the feebleness of our description. And could that heart speak; could "the bosom black as death" send forth its voice of living agony in our holy places, it would rend the vaulted arches of every sanctuary, with the cry of a pierced, and wounded, and wronged, and ruined nature!

Finally, sin does a wrong to the affections. How does it mar even that image of the affections, that mysterious shrine from which their revealings flash forth, "the human face divine;" bereaving the world of more than half its beauty! Can you ever behold sullenness clouding the clear, fair brow of childhood, or the flushed cheek of anger, or the averted and writhen features of envy, or the dim and sunken eye and haggard aspect of vice, or the red signals of bloated excess hung out on every feature, proclaiming the fire that is consuming within—without feeling that sin is the despoiler of all that the affections make most hallowed and beautiful?

But these are only indications of the wrong that is done, and the ruin that is wrought in the heart. Nature has made our affections to be full of tenderness, to be sensitive and alive to every touch, to cling to their cherished objects with a grasp, from which

nothing but cruel violence can sever them. We hear much, I know, of the coldness of the world; but I cannot believe much that I hear; nor is it perhaps meant, in any sense, that denies to man naturally, the most powerful affections; affections that demand the most gentle and considerate treatment. Human love —I am ready to exclaim—how strong is it! What yearnings are there of parental fondness, of filial gratitude, of social kindness, every where! What impatient asking of ten thousand hearts for the love of others; not for their gold, not for their praise, but for their love!

But sin enters into this world of the affections, and spreads around the death-like coldness of distrust; the word of anger falls like a blow upon the heart; or avarice hardens the heart against every finer feeling; or the insane merriment, or the sullen stupor of the inebriate man, falls like a thunder-bolt amidst the circle of kindred and children. Oh! the hearts, where sin is to do its work, should be harder than the nether mill-stone; yet it enters in among affections, all warm, all sensitive, all gushing forth in tenderness, and deaf to all their pleadings, it does its work, as if it were some demon of wrath that knew no pity, and heard no groans, and felt no relenting.

But I must not leave this subject to be regarded as if it were only a matter for abstract or curious speculation. It goes beyond reasoning; it goes to the conscience, and demands penitence and humiliation.

For of what, in this view, is the sensualist guilty? He is guilty not merely of indulging the appetites of his body; but of sacrificing to that body, a soul!—I speak literally—of sacrificing to that body a soul;

yes, of sacrificing all the transcendent and boundless creation of God in his nature, to one single nerve of his perishing frame. The brightest emanation of God, a flame from the everlasting altar, burns within him; and he voluntarily spreads over it, a fleshly veil, a veil of appetites, a veil of thick darkness; and if from its awful folds, one beam of the holy and insufferable light within breaks forth, he closes his eyes, and quickly spreads another covering of wilful delusion over it, and utterly refuses to see that light, though it flashes upon him from the shrine of the Divinity. There is, indeed, a peculiarity in the sensuality of a man, distinguishing it from the sensual gratification of which an animal is capable, and which, many men are exalted above the brutes, only to turn to the basest uses. The sensual pleasures of a human being derive a quality from the mind. They are probably more intense, through the co-operating action of the mind. The appetite of hunger, or thirst, for instance, is doubtless the same in both animal and man, and its gratification the same in *kind;* but the mind communicates to it a greater intensity. To a certain extent, this is unquestionably natural and lawful. But the mind, finding that it has this power, and that by absorption in sense, by gloating over its objects, it can for a time, add something to their enjoyment,—the mind, I say, surrenders itself to the base and ignoble ministry. The angel in man does homage to the brute in man. Reason toils for sense; the imagination panders for appetite; and even the conscience—that no faculty may be left undebased—the divine conscience strives to spread around the loathsome forms of voluptuousness, a haze of moral beauty—calling intoxication,

enthusiasm; and revelling, good fellowship; and dignifying every species of indulgence with some name that is holy.

Of what, again, is the miser, and of what is every inordinately covetous man, guilty? Conversant as he may be with every species of trade and traffic, there is one kind of barter, coming yet nearer to his interest, but of which, perchance, he has never thought. He barters virtue for gain. That is the stupendous moral traffic in which he is engaged. The very attributes of the mind are made a part of the stock, in the awful trade of avarice. And if its account-book were to state truly the *whole* of every transaction, it would often stand thus: "Gained, my hundreds or my thousands; lost, the rectitude and peace of my conscience:" "Gained, a great bargain, driven hard; lost, in the same proportion, the generosity and kindness of my affections." "Credit"—and what strife is there for that ultimate item, for that final record?—"Credit, by an immense fortune;" but on the opposing page, the last page of that moral, as truly as mercantile account, I read those words, written not in golden capitals, but in letters of fire—"a lost soul!"

Oh! my brethren, it is a pitiable desecration of such a nature as ours to give it up to the world. Some baser thing might have been given, without regret; but to bow down reason and conscience, to bind them to the clods of earth; to contract those faculties that spread themselves out beyond the world, even to infinity—to contract them to worldly trifles—it is pitiable; it is something to mourn and to weep over. He who sits down in a dungeon which another has made, has not such cause to bewail himself, as he who

sits down in the dungeon which he has thus made for himself. Poverty and destitution are sad things; but there is no such poverty, there is no such destitution, as that of a covetous and worldly heart. Poverty is a sad thing, but there is no man so poor, as he who is poor in his affections and virtues. Many a house is full, where the mind is unfurnished and the heart is empty; and no hovel of mere penury ever ought to be so sad as that house. Behold, it is left desolate—to the immortal, it is left desolate, as the chambers of death. Death *is* there indeed; and it is the death of the soul!

But not to dwell longer upon particular forms of evil—of what, let us ask is the *man* guilty? *Who* is it that is thus guilty? To say that he is noble in his nature, has been sometimes thought a dangerous laxity of doctrine, a proud assumption of merit, "a flattering unction" laid to the soul. But what kind of flattery is it, to say to a man, "you were made but little lower than the angels; you might have been rising to the state of angels; and you have made—*what* have you made yourself? What you *are*—a slave to the world—a slave to sense—a slave to masters baser than nature made them, to vitiated sense, and a corrupt and vain world!" Alas! the irony implied in such flattery as this, is not needed to add poignancy to conviction. Boundless capacities shrunk to worse than infantile imbecility! immortal faculties made toilers, for the vanities of a moment! a glorious nature sunk to a willing fellowship with evil!—alas! it needs no exaggeration, but only simple statement, to make this a sad and afflicting case. Ill enough had it been for us if we had been *made* a depraved and degraded race. Well

might the world even then, have sat down in sackcloth, and sorrow; though repentance could properly have made no part of its sorrow. But ill is it indeed, if we have made *ourselves* the sinful and unhappy beings that we are; if we have given ourselves the wounds,which have brought languishment and debility and distress upon us! What keen regret and remorse would any one of us feel, if in a fit of passion, he had destroyed his own right arm, or had implanted in it, a lingering wound! And yet this, and this last especially, is what every offender does to some faculty of his nature.

But this is not all. Ill enough had it been for us, if we had wrought out evil from nothing—if from a nature negative and indifferent to the result, we had brought forth the fruits of guilt and misery. But if we have wronged, if we have wrested from its true bias, a nature made for heavenly ends; if it was all beautiful in God's design and in our capacity, and we have made it all base, so that human nature, alas! is but the by-word of the satirist, and a mark for the scorner; if affections that might have been sweet and pure almost as the thoughts of angels, have been soured, and embittered, and turned to wrath, even in the homes of human kindness; if the very senses have been brutalized, and degraded, and changed from ministers of pleasure to inflicters of pain; and yet more, if all the dread authority of reason has been denied, and all the sublime sanctity of conscience has been set at naught in this downward course; and yet once more, if all these things—not chimerical, not visionary—are actually witnessed, are matters of history, in ten thousand dwellings, around us,—ah! if they are actually exist-

ing, my brethren, in you and in me!—and finally, if, uniting together, these causes of depravation have spread a flood of misery over the world, and there are sorrows and sighings and tears in all the habitations of men, all proceeding from this one cause; then, I say, shall penitence be thought a strange and uncalled-for emotion? Shall it be thought strange that the first great demand of the Gospel, should be for repentance? Shall it be thought strange that a man should sit down and weep bitterly for his sins —so strange that his acquaintances shall ask, "what hath he done?" or shall conclude that he is going mad with fanaticism, or is on the point of losing his reason? No—truly; the dread infatuation is on the part of those who weep not! It is the negligent world, that is fanatical and frantic, in the pursuit of unholy indulgences and unsatisfying pleasures. It is such a world refusing to weep over its sins and miseries, that is fatally deranged. Repentance, my brethren, shall it be thought a virtue difficult of exercise? What can the world sorrow for, if not for the cause of all sorrow? What is to awaken grief, if not guilt and shame? Where shall the human heart pour out its tears, if not on those desolations which have been of its own creating?

How fitly is it written, and in language none too strong, that "the sacrifices of God—are a broken and contrite heart." And how encouragingly is it written also—"a broken and contrite heart, thou wilt not despise." Oh! Israel, saith again the sacred word,—"Oh, Israel! thou hast destroyed thyself; but in me is thine help found."

DISCOURSE IV.

ON THE ADAPTATION WHICH RELIGION, TO BE TRUE AND USEFUL, SHOULD HAVE TO HUMAN NATURE.

ISAIAH XLII. 3. A BRUISED REED SHALL HE NOT BREAK, AND THE SMOKING FLAX SHALL HE NOT QUENCH.

This was spoken by prophecy of our Saviour, and is commonly considered as one of the many passages, which either prefigure or describe, the considerate and gracious adaptation of his religion, to the wants and weaknesses of human nature. This adaptation of Christianity to the wants of the mind, is, indeed, a topic that has been much, and very justly insisted on, as an evidence of its truth.

I wish however in the present discourse, to place this subject before you in a light somewhat different, perhaps, from that in which it has usually been viewed. If Christianity is suited to the wants of our nature, it is proper to consider what our nature needs. I shall therefore in the following discourse, give considerable prominence to this inquiry. The wants of our nature are various. I shall undertake to show in several respects, what a religion that is adapted to these wants, *should be*. In the same connection, I shall undertake to show that Christianity is such a religion.

This course of inquiry, I believe, will elicit some just views of religious truth, and will enable us to judge whether our own views of it are just. My object in it, is to present some temperate and comprehensive views of religion, which shall be seen at once to meet the necessities of our nature, and to accord with the spirit of the Christian religion.

Nothing, it would seem, could be more obvious, than that a religion for human beings, should be suited to human beings; not to angels, nor to demons; not to a fictitious order of creatures; not to the inhabitants of some other world; but to *men*—to men of this world, of this state and situation in which we are placed, of this nature which is given us,—to *men*, with all their passions and affections warm and alive, and all their weaknesses and wants and fears, about them. And yet evident and reasonable as all this is, nothing has been more common, than for religion to fail of this very adaptation. Sometimes, it has been made a quality all softness, all mercy and gentleness—something joyous and cheering, light and easy, as if it were designed for angels. At others, it has been clothed with features as dark and malignant, as if it belonged to fiends rather than to men. In no remote period, it has laid penances on men; as if their sinews and nerves were like the mails of steel, which they wore in those days. While the same religion, with strange inconsistency, lifted up the reins to their passions, as if it had been the age of Stoicism, instead of being the age of Chivalry. Alas! how little has there been in the religions of past ages; how little in the prevalent forms even of the Christian religion, to draw out, to expand, and brighten, the noble faculties of our

nature! How many of the beautiful fruits of human affection, have withered away under the cold and blighting touch of a scholastic and stern theology! How many fountains of joy in the human heart have been sealed and closed up for ever, by the iron hand of a gloomy superstition! How many bright spirits,—how many comely and noble natures, have been marred and crushed, by the artificial, the crude, and rough dealing of religious phrenzy and fanaticism!

It is suitable, then, it is expedient, to consider the adaptation which religion—to be true and useful—ought to have to human nature. It may serve to correct errors. It may serve to guide those who are asking what ideas of religion they are to entertain, what sentiments they are to embrace; what conduct to pursue.

In entering upon this subject, let me offer one leading observation, and afterwards proceed to some particulars.

I. I say, then, in the first place, that religion should be adapted to our *whole* nature. It should remember that we have understandings, and it should be a rational religion. It should remember that we have feelings; and it should be an earnest and fervent religion. It should remember that our feelings revolt at violence, and are all alive to tenderness, and it should be gentle, ready to entreat, and full of mercy. It should remember too that our feelings naturally lean to self-indulgence, and it should be, in its gentleness, strict and solemn. It should in a due proportion address all our faculties.

Most of the erroneous forms of religious sentiment that prevail in the Christian world, have arisen from

the predominance that has been given to some one part of our nature, in the matters of spiritual concernment. Some religions have been all speculation, all doctrine, all theology; and, as you might expect, they have been cold, barren, and dead. Others have been all feeling; and have become visionary, wild, and extravagant. Some have been all sentiment; and have wanted practical virtue. Others have been all practice; their advocates have been exclaiming "works! works! these are the evidence and test of all goodness." And so, with certain exceptions and qualifications, they are. But this substantial character of religion, this hold which it really has, upon all the active principles of our nature, has been so much, so exclusively contended for, that religion has too often degenerated into a mere, superficial, decent, morality.

Religion, then, let it be repeated, if it be true and just, addresses our whole nature. It addresses the active, and the contemplative in us; reason and imagination; thought and feeling. It is experience; but it is conduct too: it is high meditation; but then it is also humble virtue. It is excitement—it is earnestness; but no less truly, is it calmness. Let me dwell upon this last point a moment. It is not uncommon to hear it said that excitement is a very bad thing, and that true religion is calm. And yet it would seem as if, by others, repose was regarded as deadly to the soul, and as if the only safety lay in a tremendous agitation. Now what saith our nature—for the being that is the very subject of this varying discipline may surely be allowed to speak—what saith our nature to these different advisers? It says,

I think, that both are to a certain extent wrong, and both, to a certain extent right. That is to say, human nature requires, in their due proportion, both excitement and tranquillity. Our minds need a complex and blended influence; need to be at once aroused and chastened, to be at the same time quickened and subdued; need to be impelled, and yet guided; need to be humbled no doubt, and that deeply, but not that *only*, as it seems to be commonly thought—humbled, I say, and yet supported; need to be bowed down in humility, and yet strengthened in trust; need to be nerved to endurance at one time, and at another to be transported with joy.—Let religion, let the reasonable and gracious doctrine of Jesus Christ, come to us with these adaptations—generous to expand our affections, strict to restrain our passions; plastic to mould our temper, strong, ay, strong to control our will. Let religion be thus welcomed to every true principle and passion of our nature. Let it touch all the springs of intellectual and of moral life. Let it penetrate to every hidden recess of the soul, and bring forth all its powers, and enlighten, inspire, perfect them.

I hardly need say, that the Christian religion *is* thus adapted to our whole nature. Its evidences address themselves to our sober judgment. Its precepts commend themselves to our consciences. It imparts light to our understandings, and fervour to our affections. It speaks gently to our repentance; but terribly to our disobedience. It really does that for us, which religion should do. It does arouse, and chasten, quicken and subdue, impel and guide, humble and yet support: it arms us with fortitude, and it transports us with joy. It is profitable for the life that now is, and for that which is to come.

II. But I must pass now, to observe, that there are more particular adaptations which religion should have, and which the Gospel actually has, to the condition of human nature, and to the various degrees of its improvement.

One of the circumstances of our moral condition is danger. Religion then should be a guardian, and a vigilant guardian; and let us be assured that the Gospel is such. Such emphatically do we read. If we cannot bear a religion that admonishes us, watches over us, warns us, restrains us; let us be assured that we cannot bear a religion that will save us. Religion should be the keeper of the soul; and without such a keeper, in the slow and undermining process of temptation, or amidst the sudden and strong assaults of passion, it will be overcome and lost.

Again, the human condition is one of weakness. There are weak points, where religion should be stationed to support and strengthen us. Points, did I say? Are we not encompassed with weakness? Where, in the whole circle of our spiritual interests and affections, are we not exposed, and vulnerable? Where have we not need to set up the barriers of habit, and to build the strongest defences, with which resolutions and vows and prayers can surround us? Where, and wherein, I ask again, is any man safe? What virtue of any man is secure from frailty? What strong purpose of his is not liable to failure? What affection of his heart can say, "I have strength, I am established, and nothing can move me." How weak is man in trouble, in perplexity, in doubt—how weak in affliction, or when sickness bows the spirit, or when approaching death is unloosing all the bands of his pride

and self-reliance! And whose spirit does not sometimes faint under its *intrinsic* weakness, under its *native* frailty, and the burthen and pressure of its necessities? Religion then should bring supply, and support, and strength to the soul; and the Gospel does bring supply, and support, and strength. And it thus meets a universal want. Every mind *wants* the stability which principle gives, wants the comfort which piety gives: wants it continually, in all the varying experience of life.

I have said, also, that religion should be adapted to the various degrees of mental improvement, and I may add, to the diversities of temperament. Now, there are sluggish natures that need to be aroused. All the machinery of spiritual terror can scarce be too much to arouse some persons; though it may indeed be very improperly applied. But on the contrary, there *are* minds so excitable and sensitive, that religion should come to *them* with all its sobering and tranquillizing influence. In how many cases do we witness this! How many are there whose minds are chilled, or stupified by denunciation! How many are repelled by severity, or crushed by a weight of fear and anxiety! How many such are there, that need a helping hand to be stretched out to them; that need to be raised, and soothed, and comforted; that need to be won with gentleness, and cheered with promises. The Gospel has terrors, indeed, but it is not all terror; and its most awful rebukes soften into pity, over the fearful, the dejected, the anxious, and humble.

But the most striking circumstance in the adaptation of religion to the different degrees of mental im-

provement, is its character as supplying not merely the general necessities, but the conscious wants of the mind. There may be some who have never been conscious of these intrinsic wants, though they spring from human nature and must be sooner or later felt. To the very young, or to the unreflecting, religion can be scarcely any thing more, perhaps, than direction. It says, "do this, and do that; and refrain from this gratification, and beware of that danger." It is chiefly a set of rules and precepts to them. Speak to them of religion as the grand resort of the mind, as that which meets its inward necessities, supplies its deep-felt wants, fills its capacious desires; and they do not well understand you; or they do not understand, why this view of the subject should be so interesting to you. But another mind shall be bound to the Gospel by nothing so much as by its wants. It craves something, thus vast, glorious, infinite, and eternal. It sought—sought long, perhaps, and anxiously—for something thus satisfying; and it has found what it long and painfully sought, in the teachings of Jesus, in the love of God, in that world of spiritual thoughts and objects which the great teacher has opened, in that solemn and majestic vision of immortality which he has brought to light. To such a religion the soul clings with a peace and satisfaction never to be expressed,—never to be uttered. It says, "to whom shall I go—to whom shall I go? thou, O blessed religion, minister and messenger from heaven!—thou hast the words of eternal life, of eternal joy!" The language which proclaims the sufficiency of religion, which sets forth the attraction and the greatness of it, as supplying the great intellectual want, is no chi-

merical language; it is not merely a familiar language; but it is *intimate* with the deepest and the dearest feelings of the heart.

In descending to the more specific applications of the principle of religion to human nature, I must content myself for the present, with one further observation; and that is, that it meets and mingles with all the varieties of natural temperament and disposition.

Religion should not propose to break up all the diversities of individual character; and Christianity does not propose this. It did not propose this, even when it first broke upon the world with manifestation and miracle. It allowed the rash and forward Peter, the timid and doubting Thomas, the mild and affectionate John, the resolute and fervent Paul, still to retain all their peculiarities of character. The way of *becoming* religious, or interested in religion, was not the same to all. There was Cornelius, the Pagan, whose "alms and prayers were accepted;" and there were others, who became Christians, without "so much as hearing that there was any Holy Ghost." There were the immediate disciples of our Lord, who, through a course of gradual teaching, came to apprehend his spiritual kingdom; and there was Paul, to whom this knowledge came by miracle, and with a light brighter than the sun. There was the terrified jailer who fell down trembling and said, "what must I do to be saved?" and there was the cautious and inquiring Nicodemus, who, as if he had been reflecting on the matter, said, "we know that thou art a teacher come from God, for no man can do these miracles that thou doest, except God be with him."

Now it is painful to observe at this day, how little

of this individuality there is, in the prevailing and popular experience of religion. A certain process is pointed out, a certain result is described; particular views and feelings are insisted on, as the only right and true state of mind; and every man strives to bring himself through the required process to the given result. It is common, indeed, to observe, that if you read one account of a conversion, one account of a religious excitement, you have all. I charge not this to any particular set of opinions, though it may be found to have been connected with some creeds more than with others; but it results too from the very weakness of human nature. One man leans on the experience of another, and it contributes to his satisfaction, of course, to have the same experience. How refreshing is it, amidst this dull and artificial uniformity, to meet with a man whose religion is his own; who has thought and felt for himself; who has not propped up his hopes on other men's opinions; who has been willing to commune with the spirit of religion and of God, alone, and who brings forth to you the fruits of his experience, fresh and original, and is not much concerned for *your* judgment of them, provided they have nourished and comforted *himself*. I would not desire that every man should view all the matters of piety, as I do; but would rather that every man should bring the results of his own individual conviction, to aid the common cause of right knowledge and judgment.

In the diversities of character and situation that exist, there will naturally be diversities of religious experience. Some, as I have said before, are constitutionally lively, and others serious; some are ardent, and others moderate: some, also, are inclined to be

social, and others to be retired. Knowledge and ignorance, too, and refinement and rudeness of character, are cases to be provided for. And a true and thorough religion—this is the special observation I wish to make on the diversities of character—a true and thorough religion when it enters the mind will show itself by its naturally blending and mingling with the mind *as it is;* it will sit easily upon the character; it will take forms in accordance, not with the bad, but with the constitutional tempers and dispositions it finds in its subjects.

Nay, I will say yet further, that religion ought not to repress the natural buoyancy of our affections, the innocent gaiety of the heart. True religion was not designed to do this. Undoubtedly, it will discriminate. It will check what is extravagant in us, all tumultuous and excessive joy about acquisitions of little consequence, or of doubtful utility to us: it will correct what is deformed; it will uproot what is hurtful. But there is a native buoyancy of the heart, the meed of youth, or of health, which is a sensation of our animal nature, a tendency of our being. This, true religion does not propose to withstand. It does not war against our nature. As well should the cultivator of a beautiful and variegated garden, cut up all the flowers in it, or lay weights and encumbrances on them, lest they should be too flourishing and fair. Religion is designed for the *culture* of our natural faculties, not for their eradication!

It would be easy now, did the time permit, to illustrate the views which have been presented, by a reference to the teachings of our Saviour. He did not address one passion or part of our nature alone, or

chiefly. There was no one manner of address; and we feel sure as we read, that there was no one tone. He did not confine himself to any one class of subjects. He was not always speaking of death, nor of judgment, nor of eternity; frequently and solemnly as he spoke of them. He was not always speaking of the state of the sinner, nor of repentance and the new heart; though on these subjects too he delivered his solemn message. There was a varied adaptation, in his discourses, to every condition of mind, and every duty of life, and every situation in which his hearers were placed. Neither did the preaching of our Saviour possess, exclusively, any one moral complexion. It was not terror only, nor promise only; it was not exclusively severity nor gentleness; but it was each one of them in its place, and all of them always subdued to the tone of perfect sobriety. At one time we hear him saying, with lofty self-respect "neither tell I you by what authority I do these things:"—at another with all the majesty of the Son of God, we hear him, in reply to the fatal question of the judgment-hall, "Art thou the Christ?"—we hear him say, "I am; and hereafter ye shall see the Son of man seated on the throne of power and coming in the clouds of heaven." But it is the same voice that says, "come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest; take my yoke which is easy and my burden which is light, and ye shall find rest to your souls." At one time he speaks in the language of terror, and says, "fear not them who after that they have killed the body, have no more that they can do; but fear Him who is able to cast both soul and body into hell, yea, I say unto you, fear him." But at another time, the

awful admonisher breaks out into the pathetic exclamation, "Oh! Jerusalem, Jerusalem! how often would I have gathered your children, even as a hen gathereth her brood under her wings, but ye would not."

If I might be permitted now, to add a suggestion of an advisory nature, it would be in the language of an apostle; "let your *moderation* be known to all men." The true religion, the true excellence of character, requires that we should hold all the principles and affections of our nature in a due subordination, and proportion to each other; that we should subdue all the clamoring voices of passion and desire, of fear and hope, of joy and sorrow, to complete harmony; that we should regard and cultivate our nature *as a whole.* Almost all error is some truth, carried to excess, or diminished from its proper magnitude. Almost all sin is some good or useful principle, suffered to be immoderate and ungovernable, or suppressed and denied its proper influence and action. Let, then, moderation be a leading trait of our virtue and piety. This is not dulness. Nothing is farther from dulness. And nothing, surely, is more beautiful in character, or more touching, than to see a lively and intense sensibility controlled by the judgment; strong passions subdued and softened by reflection; and on the other hand, to find a vigorous, clear and manly understanding, quickened by a genuine fervor and enthusiasm. Nothing is more wise or more admirable in *action*, than to be resolute and yet calm, earnest and yet self-possessed, decided and yet modest; to contend for truth and right with meekness and charity; to go forward in a good cause, without pretension, to retire with dignity; to give without pride, and to withhold without mean-

ness; to rejoice with moderation, and to suffer with patience. And nothing I may add, was more remarkable in the character of our Saviour, than this perfect sobriety, consistency, self-control.

This, therefore, is the perfection of character. This will always be found, I believe, to be a late stage in the progress of religious worth from its first beginnings. It is comparatively easy to be one thing and that alone; to be all zeal, or all reasoning; all faith or all action; all rapture, or all chilling and captious fault-finding. Here novices begin. Thus far they may easily go. Thus far men may go, whose character is the result of temperament and not of culture; of headlong propensity, and not of careful and conscientious discipline. It is easy, for the bruised reed to be broken. It is easy, for the smoking flax to be quenched. It is easy to deal rashly and rudely with the matters of religious and virtuous experience: to make a hasty effort, to have a paroxysm of emotion, to give way to a feverish and transient feeling, and then to smother and quench all the rising purposes of a better life. But true religion comes to us with a wiser and more considerate adaptation,—to sustain and strengthen the bruised reed of human weakness; to fan the rising flame of virtuous and holy purposes: it comes to revive our failing courage, to restrain our wayward passions. It will not suffer us to go on with our fluctuations and our fancies; with our transient excitements, and momentary struggles. It will exert a more abiding, a more rational influence. It will make us more faithful and persevering. It will lay its hand on the very energies of our nature, and will take the lead and control, the forming and perfecting of them. May we find its real and

gracious power! May it lead us in the true, the firm, the brightening path of the just, till it brings us to the perfect day!

Oh! my brethren, we sin against our own peace, we have no mercy upon ourselves, when we neglect such a religion as this. It is the only wisdom, the only soundness, the only consistency and harmony of character, the only peace and blessedness of mind. We should not have our distressing doubts and fears; we should not be so subject as we are to the distracting influences of passion, or of the world without us, if we had yielded our hearts wholly to the spirit and religion of Jesus. It is a religion adapted to us all. To every affection, to every state of mind, troubled or joyous, to every period of life, it would impart the very influence that we need. How surely would it guide our youth, and how would it temper, and soften, and sanctify all the fervors of youthful affection! How well would it support our age, making it youthful again with the fervent hope of immortality! How would it lead us, too, in all the paths of earthly care, and business, and labour, turning the brief and weary courses of worldly toil into the ways that are everlasting! How faithfully and how calmly would it conduct us to the everlasting abodes! And how well, in fine, does he, of whom it was prophesied that he should not break the bruised reed nor quench the smoking flax—how well does he meet that gracious character, when he says,—shall we not listen to him?—"come unto me all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest: take my yoke which is easy, and my burden, which is light; learn of me, for I am meek and lowly in heart, and ye shall find rest unto your souls."

DISCOURSE V.

THE APPEAL OF RELIGION TO HUMAN NATURE.

PROVERBS, VIII. 4. UNTO YOU, O MEN, I CALL; AND MY VOICE IS TO THE SONS OF MEN.

THE appeal of religion to human nature, the deep wisdom of its instructions to the human heart, the language of power and of cheering with which it is fitted to address the inmost soul of man, is never to be understood, perhaps, till our nature is exalted far beyond its present measure. When the voice of wisdom and purity shall find an inward wisdom and purity to which it can speak, it will be received with a welcome and gladness, with a joy beyond all other joy, such as no tongue of eloquence has ever expressed, nor the heart of worldly sensibility ever yet conceived. It is, therefore, with the most unfeigned diffidence, with the most distinct consciousness that my present labour must be incipient and imperfect, that I enter upon this great theme—the appeal of religion to human nature.

What ought it to be? What has it been? These are the inquiries which I shall pursue. Nor shall I attempt to keep them altogether separate in the discussion; since, both the defects and the duties of religious instruction may often be best exhibited under the same head of discourse. Neither shall I labour to

speak of religion under that abstract and figurative character with which wisdom is personified in the context, though that may be occasionally convenient; but whether it be the language of individual reason, or conscience; whether it be the voice of the parent, or of the preacher; whether it be the language of forms or of institutions, I would consider how religion has appealed, and how it ought to have appealed, to human nature.

The topics of discourse, under which I shall pursue these inquiries, are the following—in *what character* should religion address us?—to *what* in us should it speak?—and *how* should it deliver its message? That is to say—the substance, the subject, and the spirit of the appeal, are the topics of our inquiry. I cannot, of course, pursue these inquiries beyond the point to which the immediate object of my discourse, will carry them; and I am willing to designate that point, at once, by saying, that, the questions are, whether the character in which religion is to appeal to us, be moral, or not; whether that in us to which it chiefly appeals should be the noblest or the basest part of our nature; and finally, whether the manner and spirit of its appeal should be that of confidence or distrust, of friendship or hatred.

I. And with regard to the first question, the answer, of course, is, that the character in which religion should address us is purely moral. As a moral principle, as a principle of rectitude, it must speak to us. Institutions, rites, commands, threatenings, promises—all forms of appeal must contain this essence; they must be moral; they must be holy.

It may be thought strange that I should insist upon

a point so obvious, but let me crave your patience. What is the centre, the first principle, the essence, of all that is moral, of all that is holy? I answer, it is goodness. This is the primary element of all virtue. Excellence, rectitude, righteousness, every virtue, every grace, is but a modification of the one, essential, all-embracing principle of love. This is strictly, metaphysically true; it is the result of the most severe, philosophical, analysis. It is also the truth of scripture. The character of Supreme perfection is summed up in this one attribute: "God is love." This is the very glory of God. For when an ancient servant desired to "see his glory," the answer to the prayer was, that "he caused all his goodness to pass before him."

The character, then, in which religion should appeal to human nature, is that of *simple* and *essential goodness*. This, the moral nature of man is made to understand and to feel; and nothing else but this. This character, doubtless, has various expressions. Sometimes it takes the forms of command and threatening; but still these must speak, in the name of goodness. If command and threatening stand up to speak for themselves—alone—dissociated from that love which gives them all their moral character—then, I say, that the moral nature of man cannot receive their message. A brute can receive that; a dog or a horse can yield to mere command or menace. But the moral nature can yield to nothing which is not moral; and that which gives morality to every precept and warning is the goodness which is breathed into them. Divest them of this, and they are not even religious. Nor are those persons religious, who pay obedience to

command, as command, and without any consideration of its moral nature, of the intrinsic and essential sanction which goodness bestows on the command.

The voice of religion, then, must be as the voice of goodness. Conceive of every thing good and lovely, of every thing morally excellent and admirable, of every thing glorious and godlike, and when these speak to you, know that religion speaks to you. Whether that voice comes from the page of genius, or from the record of heroic and heavenly virtue, or from its living presence and example, or from the bosom of silent reverie, the innermost sanctuary of meditation—whatever of holy and beautiful speaks to you, and through what medium soever, it comes, it is the voice of religion. All excellence, in other words, is religion.

But here we meet with what seems to me, and so must I denominate it, in justice to my own apprehensions,—a stupendous error; an error, prevalent, I believe, and yet fatal, so far as it goes, to all religious emotion. All excellence, I said, is religion. But the great error is, that, in the popular apprehension, these things are not identified. In other words, religion and goodness are not identified in the general mind: they are not held by most men to be the same thing. This error, I say, if it exist, is fatal to genuine religious emotion, because men cannot heartily love, as a moral quality, any thing which is not, to them, goodness. Or, to state this position as a simple truism, they cannot love any thing which is not, to them, loveliness.

Now I am willing, nay, I earnestly wish, that with regard to the real nature of religion, there should be the utmost discrimination; and I will soon speak to

that point. But I say, for the present—I say, again, that religion is made, intrinsically and altogether a different thing, from what is commonly regarded as loveliness of character, and therefore that it speaks to men, speaks to human nature, not as goodness but as some other thing.

For proof of this, I ask you, first, to look at that phraseology by which religion is commonly described, and to compare it with the language by which men express those lovely qualities that they most admire. See, then, how they express their admiration. You hear them speak of one who is amiable, lovely, fascinating; of one who is honourable, upright, generous. You hear them speak of a good parent, of an affectionate child, of a worthy citizen, of an obliging neighbour, of a kind and faithful friend, of a man whom they emphatically call "a noble man;" and you observe a fervour of language and a glow of pleasure while these things are said; a kindling animation in the tone and the countenance, which inspires you with a kindred sympathy and delight. But mark, now, with how different a language and manner, the qualities of religion are described. The votary of religion is said to be very "serious," perhaps, but with a look and tone as if a much worse thing were stated; or you hear it said of him, that he is "a pious man," or, he is "a very experienced person," or he is "a Christian if ever there was one;" but it seems, even when the religious themselves say all this, as if it were an extorted and cold homage; as if religion were something very proper indeed, very safe perhaps, but not very agreeable certainly; there is no glow, there is no animation, and there is generally no sympathy.

In further proof that religion is not identified with the beautiful and admirable in character, I might turn from the language in common use, to actual experience. *Is* religion, I ask—not the religion of poetry, but that which exists in the actual conceptions of men, the religion of professors, the religion that is commonly taught from our pulpits—is it usually regarded as the loveliest attribute of the human character? When your minds glow with the love of excellence, when you weep over the examples of goodness, is this excellence, is this goodness which you admire, religion? Consult the books of fiction, open the pages of history, resort to the stores of our classical literature, and say, if the religious man of our times appears in them at all; or if, when he does appear in them, it is he that chiefly draws your affection? Say, rather, if it is not some personage, whether of a real or fictitious tale, that is destitute of every distinctive quality of the popular religion, who kindles your enthusiasm? So true is this, that many who have held the prevailing ideas of religion, have regarded, and on their principles, have justly regarded, the literature of taste and of fiction, as one of the most insidious temptations that could befall them. No, I repeat, the images of loveliness that dwell in the general mind, whether of writers or readers, have not been the images of religion. And thus it has happened, that the men of taste, and of a lively and ardent sensibility, have, by no means, yielded their proportion of votaries to religion. The dull, the gloomy, the sick, the aged, have been religious; not—i. e. not to the same extent—the young and the joyous in their first admiration and their first love; not the intellectual and refined in the enthusiasm

of their feelings and in the glory of their imaginations.

But let me appeal once more to experience. I ask then—do you love religion? I ask you, I ask any one, who will entertain the question—do you love religion? Does the very word carry a sound that is agreeable, delightful to you? Does it stand for something attractive and lovely? Are the terms that describe religion—grace, holiness, repentance, faith, godliness—are they invested with a charm to your heart, to your imagination, to your whole mind? Now, to this question, I am sure, that many would answer freely and decidedly, "No, religion is not a thing that we love. We cannot say that we take that sort of interest in it. We do not profess to be religious, and,—honestly—we do not wish to be." What! I might answer in return—do you love nothing that is good? Is there nothing in character, nothing in attribute, no abstract charm, that you love? "Far otherwise"—would be the reply. "There are many persons that we love: there are many characters in history, in biography, in romance, that are delightful to us; they are so noble, so beautiful."

How different then—do we not see—are the ideas of religion, from the images of loveliness that dwell in many minds! They are actually the *same* in principle. All excellence has the same foundation. There are not, and cannot be, two different and opposite kinds of rectitude. The moral nature of man, deranged though it be, is not deranged so far as to admit this; and yet how evident is it, that religion is not identified with the excellence that men love!

But I hear it said, "the images of loveliness which dwell in the general mind, are *not* indeed the images

of religion, and ought not to be; for they are false, and would utterly mislead us." Grant, now, for the sake of argument, that this were true, and whom would the admission benefit? What would follow from the admission? Why, this clearly; that of being religious, no power or possibility is within human reach. For men must love that which seems to them to be lovely. If that which seems to them to be lovely is not religion—if religion is something else, and something altogether different, religion, it is clear they cannot love. That is to say, on this hypothesis, they cannot be religious; they cannot, by any possibility, but that in which all things are possible with God; they cannot by any possibility that comes within the range of the powers and affections, that God has given them.

But it is not true that men's prevailing and constitutional perceptions of moral beauty are false. It is not true, that is to say, that their sense of right and wrong is false; that, their conscience is a treacherous and deceitful guide. It is not true; and yet, doubtless, there is a discrimination to be made. Their perceptions may be, and undoubtedly often are, low, and inadequate, and marred with error. And therefore when we use the words—excellent, admirable, lovely—there is danger that to many, they will not mean all that they ought to mean, that men's ideas of these qualities will not be as deep, and thorough, and strict, as they ought to be; while, if we confine ourselves to such terms for religious qualities—as serious, holy, godly—the danger is that they will be just as erroneous, besides being technical, barren, and uninteresting.

There is a difficulty on this account attending the

language of the pulpit, which every reflecting man, in the use of it, must have felt. But the truth, amidst all these discriminations, I hold to be this; that the universal and constitutional perceptions of moral loveliness which mankind entertain, are *radically* just. And therefore the only right doctrine and the only rational direction to be addressed to men, on this subject is to the following effect; "whatever your conscience dictates; whatever your mind clothes with moral beauty; that to you is right; be that to you, religion. Nothing else can be, if you think rationally; and therefore let that be to you the religion that you love; and let it be your endeavour, continually to elevate and purify your conceptions of all virtue and goodness." Nay, if I knew a man whose ideas of excellence were ever so low, I should still say to him—revere those ideas; they are all that you can revere. The very apprehensions you entertain of the glory of God cannot go beyond your ideas of excellence. All that you can worship, then, is the most perfect excellence you can conceive of. Be that, therefore, the object of your reverence. However low, however imperfect it is, still be that to you the image of the Divinity. On that scale of your actual ideas, however humble, let your thoughts rise to higher and higher perfection.

I say, however low. And grant now that the moral conceptions of a man are very low; yet if they are the highest he has, is there any thing higher that he can follow? Will it be said there are the Scriptures? But the aid of the Scriptures is already presupposed in the case. They *contribute* to form the very perceptions in question. They are a light to man, only as they kindle a light within him. They do not, and

they cannot mean more to any man, than he understands, than he perceives, them to mean. His perceptions of their intent, then, he must follow. He cannot follow the light, any farther than he sees it.

But it may be said that many of the ignorant and debased see very little light; that their perceptions are *very* low; that they admire qualities and actions of a very questionable character. What then? You must begin with them where they are! But let us not grant too much of this. Go to the most degraded being you know, and tell him some story of noble disinterestedness, or touching charity; tell him the story of Howard, or Swartz, or Oberlin; and will he not approve—will he not admire? Then tell him, I say—as the summing up of this head of my discourse—tell him that this is religion. Tell him that this is a faint shadow, to the infinite brightness of divine love—a feeble and marred image, compared with the infinite benignity and goodness of God!

II. My next observation is, on the principles to be addressed. And, on this point, I say in general, that religion should appeal to the good in man, against the bad. That there *is* good in man—not fixed goodness—but that there is something good in man, is evident from the fact that he has an idea of goodness. For if the matter be strictly and philosophically traced, it will be found, that the idea of goodness can spring from nothing else but experience—from the inward sense of it.

But not to dwell on this—my principal object under this head of discourse is to maintain, that religion should appeal *chiefly*, not to the lowest, but to the highest of our moral sentiments.

There are sentiments in our nature to which powerful appeal can be made, and they are emphatically, its high and honourable sentiments. If you wished to speak in tones that should thrill through the very heart of the world, you would speak to these before all others. Almost all the richest poetry, the most admirable, the fine arts, the most popular and powerful eloquence in the world have addressed these moral, and generous sentiments of human nature. And I have observed it as quite remarkable, indeed—because it is an exception to the general language of the pulpit—that all the most eloquent preachers have made great use of these very sentiments—they have appealed to the sense of beauty, to generosity and tenderness, to the natural conscience, the natural sense of right and wrong, of honour and shame.

To these, then, if you would move the human heart, you would apply yourself. You would appeal to the indignation at wrong, at oppression, or treachery, or meanness, or to the natural admiration which men feel for virtuous and noble deeds. If you would touch the most tender feelings of the human heart, you would still make your appeal to these sentiments. You would represent innocence borne down and crushed by the arm of power; you would describe patriotism labouring and dying for its country. Or, you would describe a parent's love with all its cares and anxieties, and its self-sacrificing devotion. Or, you would pourtray filial affection watching over infirmity, and relieving pain, and striving to pay back something of the mighty debt of filial gratitude. Look abroad in the world, or look back upon the history of ages past, and ask for those on whom the enthusiasm

and pride and affection of men love to dwell. Evoke from the shadows of the times gone by, their mighty, their cherished forms, around which the halo of everlasting admiration dwells: and what are they? Behold the names of the generous, the philanthropic, and the good—behold, the voice of martyred blood on the altars of cruelty, or on the hills of freedom, for ever rising from the earth—eternal testimonies to the right and noble sentiments of mankind.

To these, then, religion ought to have appealed. In these sentiments, it ought to have laid its foundation, and on these it ought to have built up its power. But has it done so? *Could* it do so, while it held human nature to be utterly depraved?

But there is a farther question. *Can any* religion, Christian or heathen, in fact, entirely discard human nature? Certainly not. Must not every religion that speaks to man, speak to *something* human? Undoubtedly, it must. What then is the end of all this zeal against human nature? Has it not been, I ask, to address the worst parts of it? There has been no scruple, about appealing to fear and anxiety. But of the sentiments of admiration, of the sense of beauty in the human heart, of the deep love for friends and kindred that lingers there, religion has been afraid. Grant, indeed, that these sentiments and affections have been too low. It was the very business of religion to elevate them. But while it has failed to do this, in the degree it ought, how often has it spread a rack of torture for our fear and solicitude! How often has it been an engine of superstition, an inflicter of penance, a minister of despondency and gloom; an instrument effective, as if it were framed on purpose, to keep

down all natural buoyancy, generosity, and liberal aspiration! How often has religion frowned upon the nature, that it came to save; and instead of winning its confidence and love, has incurred its hatred and scorn; and instead of having drawn it into the blessed path of peace and trust, has driven it to indifference, infidelity, or desperation!

And how lamentable is it! Here is a world of beings, filled with enthusiasm, filled with a thousand warm and kindling affections; the breasts of millions are fired with admiration for generous and heroic virtues; and when the living representative of these virtues appears among us—a Washington, or some illustrious compeer in excellence—crowded cities go forth to meet him, and nations lift up the voice of gratitude. How remarkable in the human character is this moral admiration! What quickening thoughts does it awaken in solitude! What tears does it call forth, when we think of the prisons, the hospitals, the desolate dwellings, visited and cheered by the humane and merciful! With what ecstasy does it swell the human breast, when the vision of the patriotic, the patiently suffering, the magnanimous and the good, passes before us! In all this the inferior race has no share. They can fear; but esteem, veneration, the sense of moral loveliness, they know not. These are the prerogatives of man—the gifts of nature to him—the gifts of God. But how little, alas! have they been called into the service of his religion! How little have their energies been enlisted in that which is the great concern of man!

And all this is the more to be lamented, because those who are most susceptible of feeling and of en-

thusiasm, most need the power and support of religion. The dull, the earthly, the children of sense, the mere plodders in business, the mere votaries of gain, may do, or may think they can do, without it. But how many beings are there, how many spirits of a finer mould, and of a loftier bearing, and of more intellectual wants, who, when the novelty of life is worn off, when the enthusiasm of youth has been freely lavished, when changes come on, when friends die, and there is care and weariness, and solitude to press upon the heart—how many are there, then, that sigh bitterly after some better thing, after something greater, and more permanent, and more satisfying! And how do they need to be told that religion is that better thing; that it is not a stranger to their wants and sorrows; that its voice is speaking and pleading within them, in the cry of their lamentation, and in the felt burthen of their necessity; that religion is the home of their far-wandering desires; the rest, the heaven, of their long-troubled affections! How do they need to hear the voice that says, "unto you, O men—men of care, and fear, and importunate desire—do I call; and my voice is to the sons of men—to the children of frailty, and trouble, and sorrow!"

III. Let us now proceed to consider, in the third place, and finally, from the relation between the power that speaks and the principle addressed, in what manner the one should appeal to the other.

The relation, then, between them, I say, is a relation of amity. But let me explain. I do not say, of course, that there is amity between right and wrong. I do not say, that there is amity between pure goodness, and what is evil in man. But that which is

wrong and evil in man, is the perversion of something that is good and right. To that good and right, I contend that religion should speak. To that it must speak, for there is nothing else, that can hear it. We do not appeal to abstractions of evil in man, because there are no such things in him; but we appeal to affections; to affections in which there is a mixture of good and evil. To the good, then, I say, we must appeal, *against* the evil. And every preacher of righteousness, may boldly and fearlessly approach the human heart, in the confidence that however it may defend itself against him, however high it may build its battlements of habit and its towers of pride, he has friends in the very citadel.

I say, then, that religion should address the true moral nature of man, as its friend, and not as its enemy; as its lawful subject, and not as an alien or a traitor; and should address it, therefore, with generous and hopeful confidence, and not with cold and repulsive distrust. What *is* it, in this nature to which religion speaks? To reason, to conscience, to the love of happiness, to the sense of the infinite and the beautiful, to aspirations after immortal good; to natural sensibility, also, to the love of kindred and country and home. All these are in this nature, and they are all fitted to render obedience to religion. In this obedience they are satisfied, and indeed they can never be satisfied without it.

Admit, now, that these powers are ever so sadly perverted and corrupted, still, no one maintains, that they are destroyed. Neither is their testimony to what is right ever, in any case, utterly silenced. Should they not, then, be appealed to in a tone of confidence?

Suppose, for instance, to illustrate our observation, that simple reason were appealed to any subject *not* religious; and suppose to make the case parallel, that the reason of the man on that subject were very much perverted, that he was very much prejudiced and misled. Yet would not the argument be directed to his reason, as a principle actually existing in him, and as a principle to be confided in and to be recovered from its error? Would not every tone of the argument and of the expostulation show confidence in the principle addressed?

Oh! what power might religion have had, if it had breathed this tone of confidence; if it had gone down into the deep and silent places of the heart as the voice of friendship; if it had known what dear and precious treasures of love and hope and joy are there, ready to be made celestial by its touch; if it had spoken to man as the most affectionate parent would speak to his most beloved, though sadly erring child; if it had said in the emphatic language of the text, "unto you, O *men*, I call, and my voice is to the sons of men;" lo! I have set my love upon you—upon you, men of the strong and affectionate nature, of the aspiring and heaven-needing soul—not upon inferior creatures, not upon the beasts of the field, but upon you have I set my love; give entrance to me, not with fear and mistrust, but with good hope and with gladness; give entrance to me, and I will make my abode with you, and I will build up all that is within you, in glory, and beauty, and ineffable brightness." Alas! for our erring and sinful, but also misguided and ill-used nature; bad enough, indeed, we have made it or suffered it to be made; but if a better lot had befallen it,

if kindlier influences had breathed upon it, if the parent's and the preacher's voice, inspired with every tone of hallowed feeling, had won it to piety, if the train of social life, with every attractive charm of goodness, had led it in the consecrated way, we had ere this known, what now alas! we so poorly know—we had known what it is to be children of God, and heirs of heaven.

My friends, let religion speak to us, in its own true character, with all its mighty power, and winning candour and tenderness. It is the principle of infinite wisdom that speaks. From that unknown period before the world was created—so saith the holy record—from the depth of eternity, from the centre of infinity, from the heart of the universe, from "the bosom of God"—its voice has come forth, and spoken to us—to us, men, in our lowly habitations. What a ministration is it! It is the infinite communing with the finite; it is might communing with frailty; it is mercy stretching out its arms, to the guilty. It is goodness, taking part with all that is good in us, against all that is evil. So full, so overflowing, so all-pervading, is it, that all things give it utterance. It speaks to us in every thing lowly, and in every thing lofty. It speaks to us every whispered accent of human affection; and in every revelation that is sounded out from the spreading heavens. It speaks to us from this lowly seat at which we bow down in prayer—from this humble shrine veiled with the shadows of mortal infirmity; and it speaks to us alike, from those altar-fires, that blaze in the heights of the firmament. It speaks where the seven thunders utter their voices; and it sends forth its voice—of pity more than human, of

agony more than mortal—from the silent summit of Calvary.

Can a principle so sublime and so benignant as religion, speak to us but for our good? Can infinity, can omnipotence, can boundless love, speak to us, but in the spirit of infinite generosity, and candour, and tenderness? No; it may be the infirmity of man to use a harsh tone, and to heap upon us bitter and cruel upbraidings; but so speaks not religion. It says—and I trace an accent of tenderness and entreaty in every word—"unto you, O men, I call; and my voice—my voice is to the children of men."

O man! whosoever thou art, hear that voice of wisdom. Hear it, thou sacred conscience! and give not way to evil; touch no bribe; touch not dishonest gain; touch not the sparkling cup of unlawful pleasure. Hear it, ye better affections! dear and holy! and turn not your purity to pollution, and your sweetness to bitterness, and your hope, to shame. Hear it, poor, wearied, broken, prostrate, human nature! and rise to penitence, to sanctity, to glory, to heaven. Rise now; lest soon, it be for ever too late. Rise, at this entreaty of wisdom, for wisdom can utter no more. Rise,—arise at this voice—for the universe is exhausted of all its revelations—infinity, omnipotence, boundless love have lavished their uttermost resource in this one provision, this one call, this one Gospel, of mercy!

DISCOURSE VI.

SPIRITUAL INTERESTS, REAL AND SUPREME.

JOHN VI. 26, 27. JESUS ANSWERED THEM AND SAID, VERILY VERILY I SAY UNTO YOU, YE SEEK ME, NOT BECAUSE YE SAW THE MIRACLES, BUT BECAUSE YE DID EAT OF THE LOAVES AND WERE FILLED. LABOUR NOT FOR THE MEAT WHICH PERISHETH, BUT FOR THAT MEAT WHICH ENDURETH UNTO ETERNAL LIFE.

THE contrast here set forth, is between a worldly mind and a spiritual mind: and so very marked and striking is it, that the fact upon which it is based, may seem to be altogether extraordinary—a solitary instance of Jewish stupidity, and not applicable to any other people, or any after times. Our Saviour avers that the multitude who followed him, on a certain occasion, did so, not because they saw those astonishing miracles, that gave witness to his spiritual mission; but simply, because they did eat of the loaves, and were filled. Yet, strange as it may seem, the same great moral error, I believe, still exists; the same preference of sensual to spiritual good, though the specific exemplification of the principle can no longer be exhibited among men. But let us attend to our Saviour's exhortation. "Labour not for the meat that perisheth, but for that meat which endureth unto eternal life."

The word, *labour*, refers to the business of life. It is as if our Saviour had said, work, toil, care, provide, for the soul. And it is in this sense of the word, as well as in the whole tenor of the passage, that I find the leading object of my present discourse: which is to show that spiritual interests, the interests of the mind and heart, the interests of reason and conscience, however neglected, however forgotten amidst the pursuit of sensual and worldly objects, are nevertheless real and supreme; that they are not visionary because spiritual; but that they are most substantial and weighty interests, and most truly deserving of that earnest attention, that laborious exertion, which is usually given to worldly interests.

So does not the world regard them, any more than did the Jews of old. It is written that the "children of this world are wiser in their generation"—i. e. after their manner wiser, than the children of light. But the children of this world not content with this concession, are apt to think that they are every way, wiser. And the special ground of this assumption, though they may not be aware of it, is, I believe, the notion which they entertain that *they* are dealing with real and substantial interests. Religious men, they conceive, are occupied with matters which are vague and visionary, and which scarcely have any real existence. A great property is something fixed and tangible, sure and substantial. But a certain view of religion, a certain state of mind, is a thing of shadow—an abstraction vanishing into nothing. The worldly-wise man admits that it may be well enough for some people; at any rate, he will not quarrel with it; he does not think it worth his troubling himself about it; his aim, his plan,

his course, is a different one, and—the implication is—a wiser one.

Yes, the very wisdom implied in religion is frequently accounted to be wisdom of but an humble order; the wisdom of dulness or of superstitious fancy or fear; or at most, a very scholastic, abstract, useless wisdom. And the very homage which is usually paid to religion, the hackneyed acknowledgment that it is very well, very proper, a very good thing; or the more solemn, if not more dull confession of "the great importance of religion;" and more especially the demure and mechanical manner in which these things are said, proclaim as plainly as any thing can, that it has not yet become a living interest in the hearts of men. It has never, in fact, taken its proper place among human concerns. I am afraid it must be said that with most men, the epithet most naturally attaching itself to religion, to religious services, to prayers, to books of sermons, is the epithet, *dull*. And it is well known, as a fact, very illustrative of this state of mind, that for a long time, parents in this country, were wont to single out and destine for the ministry of religion, the dullest of their sons.

I know of nothing more important therefore, than to show that religion takes its place among objects that are of actual concern to men and to all men; that its interests are not only of the most momentous, but of the most practical character; that the wisdom that winneth souls, the religion that takes care for them, is the most useful, the most reasonable of all wisdom and discipline. It is of *the care of the soul*, then, that I would speak; of its wisdom, of its reasonableness, of its actual interest to the common sense and welfare of men.

The ministry of the Gospel is often denominated the care of souls; and I consider this language, rightly explained, as conveying a very comprehensive and interesting description of the office. It *is* the care of souls. This is its whole design, and ought to be its whole direction, impulse, strength, and consolation. And this, too, if it were justly felt, would impart an interest, an expansion, a steady energy, a constant growth, and a final and full enlargement to the mind of the Christian teacher, not surpassed certainly, in any other profession or pursuit in life. Whether the sacred office has had this effect to as great an extent as other professions, is, to the Clergy at least a very serious question. I am obliged to doubt whether it has. Certainly, to say, that its spirit, has been characterized by as much natural warmth, and hearty earnestness as that of other pursuits; that its eloquence has been as free and powerful as that of the Senate and the Bar; that its literature has been as rich as that of poetry or even of fiction,—this is more than I dare aver.

But not to dwell on this question—it is to my present purpose to observe that the very point, from which this want of a vivid perception of religious objects has arisen, is the very point, from which help must come. Men have not perceived the interests of the mind and heart, to be the realities that they are. Here is the evil; and here we must find the remedy. Let the moral states, experiences, feelings of the soul, become *but* as interesting, as the issue of a lawsuit, the success of business, or the result of any worldly enterprize, and there would be no difficulty; there would be no complaint of dulness, either from our own bosoms or from the lips of others. Strip off from the inward soul

those many folds and coverings—the forms and fashions of life, the robes of ambition, the silken garments of luxury, the fair array of competence and comfort, and the fair *semblances* of comfort and happiness—strip the mind naked and bare to the view; and unfold those workings within, where feelings and principles make men happy or miserable; and we should no more have such a thing as religious indifference in the world! Sin there might be; outbreaking passion, outrageous vice; but apathy there could not be. It would not require a sentiment of rectitude even, it would hardly need, that a man should have any religion at all, to feel an interest in things so vital to his welfare. Why do men care as they do for worldly things? Is it not because they expect happiness, or think to ward off misery with them? Only let them be convinced then, that happiness and misery depend much more upon the principles and affections of their own minds, and would they not transfer the greater portion of their interest, to those principles and affections? Would it not result from a kind of mental necessity, like that which obliges the artisan to look to the mainspring of his machinery? Add, then, to this distinct perception of the real sources of happiness, an ardent benevolence, an earnest desire for men's welfare; and from this union would spring that spiritual zeal, that ardour in the concerns of religion and benevolence, of which so much is said, so little is felt; and of which the deficiency is so much lamented. I am willing to make allowance for constitutional differences of temperament, and indeed for many difficulties; but still I maintain that there is enough in the power of religious truths and affections to overcome all obstacles. I do maintain,

that if the objects of religion were perceived to be what they are, and were felt as they ought to be, and as every man is capable of feeling them, we should no more have such things among us, as dull sermons or dull books of piety, or dull conferences on religion, than dull conversations on the exchange, or dull pleadings at the bar, or even than dull communications of slander by the fireside.

I have thus far been engaged with stating the obvious utility and certain efficacy of the right conviction on this subject. But I have done it as preliminary to a closer argument for the right conviction. Let us, then, enter more fully upon consideration of the great spiritual interest. Let us, my brethren, enter somewhat at large, into the consideration of religion as an interest; and of the place which it occupies among human interests. Among the cares of life, let us consider the care of the soul. For it is certain that the interior, the spiritual being has as yet obtained no just recognition, in the maxims of this world.

The mind indeed—if we would but understand it—is the great central power, in the movements of this world's affairs. All the scenes of this life, from the busiest to the most quiet, from the gravest to the gayest, are the varied developments of that same mind. The world is spread out as a theatre for one great action—the action of a mind; and it is so to be regarded, whether as a sphere of trial, or of suffering, of enjoyment or of discipline, of private interests or of public history. Life, with all its cares and pursuits, with all its aspects of the superficial, the frivolous, and the gross, is but the experience of a mind. Life, I

say, dull, plodding, weary life, as many call it, is after all, a spiritual scene; and this is the description of it, that is of the deepest import to us.

I know and repeat, that the appearances of things, to many at least, are widely different from this representation. I am not ignorant of the prevailing and worldly views of this subject. There are some, I know, who look upon this life as a scene not of spiritual interests, but of worldly pleasures. The gratifications of sense, the opportunities of indulgence, the array in which fashion clothes its votaries, the splendour of entertainments, the fascinations of amusement, absorb them; or absorb, at least, all the admiration they feel for the scene of this life. Upon others, again, I know that the cloud of affliction descends; and it seems to them to come down visibly. Evil and trouble are to them, mainly things of condition and circumstance. They are thinking chiefly of this thing as unfortunate, and of that, as sad; and they forget that intrinsic character of the mind which lends the darkest hue, and which might give an aspect of more than earthly brightness, to all their sufferings. And then again, to the eyes of others, toil presents itself; with rigid sinews and strong arm, indeed, but weary too—weary, worn down with fatigue, and perhaps disconsolate in spirit. And to its earthly-minded victims—for victims they are with that mind—it seems, I know, as if this world were made but to work in; and as if death, instead of being the grand entrance to immortality, were sufficiently commended to them, as a rest and a release. And last of all, gain, the master pursuit of all, since it ministers to all other pursuits, urges its objects upon our attention. There

are those, I know, to whom this world—world of spiritual probation and immortal hope as it is,—is but one great market-place; a place for buying and selling and getting profit; a place in which to hoard treasures, to build houses, to enjoy competence, or to lavish wealth.

And these things, I know, are called interests. The matters of religion are instructions; ay, and excellent instructions—for men can garnish with epithets of eulogium, the objects on which they are to bestow nothing but praise. And such alas! are, too often, the matters of religion; they are excellent instructions, glorious doctrines, solemn ordinances, important duties; but to the mass of mankind, they are not yet interests. That brief word, with no epithet, with no pomp of language about it, expresses more, far more, than most men ever really attribute to religion, and the concerns of the soul. Nay, and the interest that is felt in religion—I have spoken of dulness—but the interest that is felt in religion, is often of a very doubtful, superficial, unreal character. Discourses upon religion, excite a kind of interest, and sometimes it might seem, as if that interest were strong. And strong of its kind, it may be. But of what kind is it? How deep, how efficient is it? How many are there, that would forego the chance of a good mercantile speculation, for the moral effect of the most admirable sermon that ever was preached? Oh! no: then it is a different thing. Religion is a good thing by the bye; it is a pleasant thing for entertainment; it is a glorious thing to muse and meditate upon; but bring it into competition or comparison with real interests, and then to many, it at once

becomes something subtile, spiritual, invisible, imperceptible :—it weighs nothing, it counts nothing, it will sell for nothing, and in thousands of scenes, in thousands of dwellings in this world, it is held to be good for nothing! This statement, God knoweth, is made with no lightness of spirit, though it had almost carried me, from the vividness of the contrast which it presents, to lightness of speech. How sad and lamentable is it, that beings whose soul is their chief distinction, should imagine that the things which most concern them, are things of appearance! I said, the vividness of the contrast; yet in truth it has been but half exhibited. It seems like extravagance to say it, but I believe, it is sober truth, that there are many whom the very belief, the acknowledged record of their immortality, has never interested half so deeply as the frailest leaf on which a bond or a note is written—many whom no words of the Gospel ever aroused and delighted, and kindled to such a glow of pleasure, as a card of compliment, or a sentence of human eulogium! Indeed, when we draw a line of division between the worldly and spiritual, between the beings of the world and the beings of the soul, between creatures of the outside and creatures of the intellect and of immortality, how few will really be found among the elect, the chosen, and faithful! And how many who could scarcely suspect it, perhaps, would be found on the side of the world—would be found among those who in their pursuits and judgments, are more affected by appearances than by realities, who are more powerfully acted upon by outward possessions, than by inward qualities, who, even in their loftiest sentiments, their admiration of

great and good men, have their enthusiasm full as much awakened by the estimation in which those men are held, as by their real merits.

And when we consider all this, when we look upon the strife of human passions too, the zeal, the eagerness, the rivalship, the noise, and bustle, with which outward things are sought; the fear, the hope, the joy, the sorrow, the discontent, the pride of this world, all, to so great an extent fastening themselves upon what is visible and tangible, it is not strange that many should come almost insensibly to feel as if they dwelt in a world of appearances; and as if nothing were real and valuable but what is seen and temporal. It is not altogether strange, that the senses have spread a broad veil of delusion over the earth, and that the concerns of every man's mind and heart, have been covered up and kept out of sight, by a mass of forms and fashions, and of things called interests.

And yet, notwithstanding all these aspects of things, I maintain, and I will show, that the real and main interest which concerns every man, lies in the state of his own mind; that habits are of far more consequence to him than possessions and treasures; that affections, simple and invisible things though they be, are worth more to him, than rich dwellings, and broad lands, and coveted honours. I maintain, that no man is so worldly, or covetous, or voluptuous—that no man is so busy, or ambitious, or frivolous, but this is true of him. Let him be religious, or not religious, let him be the merest slave of circumstances, the merest creature of vanity and compliment, that ever existed; and still it is true, and none the less true,

that his welfare lies within. There are no scenes of engrossing business, tumultuous pleasure, hollow-hearted fashion, or utter folly, but the deepest principles of religion are concerned with them. Indeed, I look upon all these varied pursuits as the strugglings of the deeper mind,—as the varied developments of the one great desire of happiness. And he who forgets that deeper mind, and sees nothing, and thinks of nothing, but the visible scene, I hold to be as unwise as the man, who entering upon the charge of one of our manufactories, should gaze upon the noisy and bustling apparatus above, should occupy himself with its varied movements, its swift and bright machinery, and its beautiful fabrics, and forget the mighty wheel, that moves all from beneath.

But let us pursue the argument. The *mind*, it will be recollected, is that which is happy or unhappy—not goods and fortunes; not even the senses; they are but the inlets of pleasure to the mind. But this, as it is a mere truism, though a decisive one in the case, is not the proposition which I am to maintain. Neither am I to argue on the other hand, that the mind is independent of circumstances; that its situation, in regard to wealth or poverty, distinction or neglect, society or solitude, is a thing of no consequence. As well say, that its relation to health or sickness is a thing of no consequence. But this I say and maintain, that what every man has chiefly at stake, lies in the mind; that his excellence depends entirely upon that; that his happiness ordinarily depends more upon the mind itself, upon its own state and character, than upon any outward condition; that those evils, with which the human race

is afflicted are mainly evils of the mind; and that the care of the soul, which religion enjoins, is the grand and only remedy for human wants and woes.

The considerations which bear upon this estimate of the real and practical welfare of men, may be drawn from every sphere of human life and action; from every contemplation of mankind, whether in their condition, relations, or attributes; from society, from God's providence, from human nature itself. Let us, then, in the first place consider *society*, in several respects; in a general view of the evils that disturb or afflict it; in its intercourse; in its domestic scenes; in its religious institutions; and in its secular business and worldly condition. These topics will occupy the time that remains for our present meditation.

It is the more desirable to give some latitude to this part of our illustration, because it is in social interests and competitions especially, that men are apt to be worldly; i. e. to be governed by considerations extrinsic and foreign to the soul. The social man, indeed, is often worldly, while the same man in retirement, is after his manner devout.

What then are the evils in society at large? I answer, they are mainly, evils of the mind. Let us descend to particulars. Some for instance, are depressed and irritated by neglect; and others are elated and injured by flattery. These are large classes of society around us; and the first, I think, by far the largest class. Both are unfortunate; both are wrong, probably; and not only so, but society is wrong for treating them in these ways,—and the wrong, the evil in every instance, lies in the mind. Some again, want excitement, want ob-

ject; and duty and religion would fill their hearts with constant peace, and with a plentitude of happy thoughts. Others want restraint, want the power to deny themselves, and want to know that such self-denial is blessed, and true piety would teach them this lofty knowledge; true piety, would gently and strongly control all their passions. In short, ennui, and excess, intemperance, slander, variance, rivalship, pride, and envy, —these are the miseries of society, and they are all miseries that exist in the mind. Where would our account end, if we were to enumerate all the things that awaken our fears, in the progress and movements of the social world around us? Good men differ and reject each other's light and countenance; and bad men, alas! agree but too well; wise men dispute, and fools laugh; the selfish grasp; the ambitious strive; the sensual indulge themselves; and it seems, at times, as if the world were going surely, if not swiftly, to destruction! And why? Only, and always, and every where, because the mind is not right. Put holy truth in every false heart, instil a sacred piety into every worldly mind, and a blessed virtue into every fountain of corrupt desires; and the anxieties of philanthropy might be hushed, and the tears of benevolent prayer and faith, might be dried up; and patriotism and piety might gaze upon the scene and the prospect with unmingled joy. Surely then, the great interests of society are emphatically the interests of religion and virtue.

And if we estimate the condition of society upon the great scale of its national interests, we shall find that intellectual and moral character marks every degree upon that scale. Why is it that the present

grand era of promise in the world, is so perilous too? Why is it that Europe, with her struggling multitude of states, and her struggling multitude of people, cannot safely work out that great political reform, to which the eyes of her thousands and her millions, are anxiously and eagerly looking? Why is the bright and broad pathway before her, darkened to the vision of the philosophic and wise—darkened with doubt and apprehension? Only, I repeat, and always, and every where, because the mind is not right. Put sound wisdom and sobriety, and mutual good will, into the hearts of all rulers and people, and the way would be plain, and easy, and certain, and glorious.

But let us contract again the circle of our observation. Gather any circle of society to its evening assembly. And what is the evil there? He must think but little, who imagines there is none. I confess that there are few scenes that more strongly dispose me to reflection, than this. I see great and signal advantages, fair and fascinating opportunities for happiness. The ordinary, or rather the ordinarily recognised evils of life, have no place in the throng of social entertainment. They are abroad, indeed, in many a hovel, and hospital, and by many a wayside; but from those brilliant and gay apartments they are, for the time, excluded. The gathering is, of youth, and lightness of heart, and prosperous fortune. The manly brow flushed with the beauty of its early day, the fair form of outward loveliness, the refined understanding, the accomplished manner, the glad parent's heart, and confiding filial love, and music and feasting are there; and yet beneath many a soft raiment and many a silken fold, I know that hearts are beating, which are full of dis-

quietude and pain. The selfishness of parental anxiety, the desire of admiration, the pride of success, the mortification of failure, the vanity that is flattered, the ill-concealed jealousy, the miserable affectation, the distrustful embarrassment,—that comprehensive difficulty which proceeds to some extent indeed from the fault of the individual, but much more from the general fault of society—these are the evils from which the gayest circles of the social world need to be reformed; and these too are evils in the mind. They are evils which nothing, but religion and virtue can ever correct. The remedy must be applied where the disease is, and that is to the soul.

But now follow society to its homes. There is, indeed, and eminently, the scene of our happiness or of our misery. And it is too plain to be insisted on, that domestic happiness depends ordinarily and chiefly, upon domestic honour and fidelity, upon disinterestedness, generosity, kindness, forbearance; and the vices opposite to these, are the evils that embitter the peace and joy of domestic life. Men in general are sufficiently sensible to this part of their welfare. Thousands all around us, are labouring by day, and meditating by night, upon the means of building up, in comfort and honour, the families, with whose fortunes and fate their own is identified. Here, then, if any where—here in these homes of our affection, are interests. And surely, I speak not to discourage a generous self-devotion to them, or a reasonable care of their worldly condition. But I say, that this *condition* is not the main thing, though it is commonly made so. I say that there is something of more consequence to the happiness of a family, than the apartments it

occupies, or the furniture that adorns them; something of dearer and more vital concernment, than costly equipage, or vast estates, or coveted honours. I say, that if its members have any thing within them, that is worthy to be called a mind, their main interests are their thoughts and their virtues. Vague and shadowy things they may appear to some; but let a man be ever so worldly, and this is true; and it is a truth which he cannot help: and all the struggle of family ambition, and all the pride of its vaunted consequence, and cherished luxury, will only the more demonstrate it to be true.

Choose, then, what scene of social life you will, and it can be shown beyond all reasonable doubt, that the main concern, the great interest there is the state of the mind.

What is it that makes dull and weary services at church;—if, alas! we must admit that they sometimes are so. A living piety in the congregation, a fervent love of God, and truth, and goodness, would communicate life, I had almost said, to the dullest service that ever passed in the house of God: and, if destitute of that piety, the preaching of an angel would awaken in us only a temporary enthusiasm. A right and holy feeling would make the house of God, the place for devout meditation, a place more profoundly, more keenly interesting, than the thronged mart, or the canvassing hall, or the tribunal that is to pass judgment on a portion of our property. Do you say that the preacher is sometimes dull, and that is all the difficulty? No, it is not all the difficulty; for the dullest haranguer that ever addressed an infuriated mob, when speaking their sentiments, is received with shouts of ap-

plause. Suppose that a company were assembled to consider and discuss some grand method to be proposed, for acquiring fortunes for themselves—some south-sea scheme, or project for acquiring the mines of Potosi; and suppose that some one should rise to speak to that company, who could not speak eloquently, nor in an interesting manner: grant all that—but suppose this dull speaker could say something, could state some fact or consideration, to help on the great inquiry. Would the company say that they could not listen to him? Would the people say that they would not come to hear him again? No, the speaker might be as awkward and as prosaic, as he pleased; he might be some humble observer, some young engineer—but he would have attentive and crowded auditories. A feeling in the hearers would supply all other deficiencies.

Shall this be so in worldly affairs, and shall there be nothing like it in religious affairs? Grant that the speaker on religion is not the most interesting; grant that he is dull; grant that his emotions are constitutionally less earnest than yours are—yet I say—what business have you to come to church to be passive in the service, to be acted on, and not yourselves to act? And yet more, what warrant have you, to let your affections to your God depend on the infirmity of any mortal being? Is that awful presence that filleth the sanctuary, though no cloud of incense be there—is the vital and never-dying interest which you have in your own mind—is the wide scene of living mercies that surrounds you, and which you have come to meditate upon—is it all indifferent to you, because one poor, erring mortal is cold and dead to it? I do not ask

you to say that he is not dull, if he is dull; I do not ask you to say that *he* is interesting; but I ask you to be interested in spite of him. His very dulness, if he is dull, ought to move you. If you cannot weep with him, you ought to weep for him.

Besides, the weakest or the dullest man tells you truths of transcendent glory and power. He tells you that "God is love;" and how might that truth, though he uttered not another word, or none but dull words—how might that truth spread itself out into the most glorious and blessed contemplations! Indeed, the simple truths are after all the great truths. Neither are they always best understood. The very readiness of assent is sometimes an obstacle to the fulness of the impression. Very simple matters, I am aware, are those to which I am venturing to call your attention, in this hour of our solemnities; and yet do I believe, that if they were clearly perceived and felt among men at large, they would begin, from this moment, the regeneration of the world!

But pass now from the silent and holy sanctuary, to the bustling scene of this world's business and pursuit. "Here," the worldly man will say, "we have reality. Here, indeed, are interests. Here is something worth being concerned about." And yet even here do the interests of religion and virtue pursue him, and press themselves upon his attention.

Look, for instance, at the condition of life, the possession, or the want, of those blessings for which business is prosecuted. What is it that distresses the poor man, and makes poverty in the ordinary condition of it, the burden that it is? It is not, in this country,—it is not usually, hunger, nor cold, nor naked-

ness. It is some artificial want created by the wrong state of society. It is something nearer yet to us, and yet more unnecessary. It is mortification, discontent, peevish complaining, or envy of a better condition; and all these are evils of the mind. Again, what is it that troubles the rich man, or the man who is successfully striving to be rich? It is not poverty, certainly, nor is it exactly possession. It is occasional disappointment, it is continual anxiety, it is the extravagant desire of property, or worse than all, the vicious abuse of it; and all these too are evils of the mind.

But let our worldly man, who will see nothing but the outside of things, who will value nothing but possessions, take another view of his interest. What is it that cheats, circumvents, overreaches him? It is dishonesty. What disturbs, vexes, angers him? It is some wrong from another, or something wrong in himself. What steals his purse, or robs his person? It is not some unfortunate mischance that has come across his path. It is a being in whom nothing worse resides, than fraud and violence. What robs him of that, which is dearer than property, his fair name among his fellows? It is the poisonous breath of foul and accursed slander. And what is it, in fine, that threatens the security, order, peace, and well-being of society at large; that threatens, if unrestrained, to deprive our estates, our comforts, our domestic enjoyments, our personal respectability, and our whole social condition, of more than half their value? It is the spirit of injustice and wild misrule in the human breast; it is political intrigue, or popular violence; it is the progress of corruption, intemperance, lascivi-

ousness,—the progress of vice and sin, in all their forms. I know that these are very simple truths; but if they are very simple, and very certain, how is it that men are so worldly? Put obligation out of the question; how is it, that they are not more sagacious and wary with regard to their interests? How is it that the means of religion and virtue are so indifferent to many, in comparison with the means of acquiring property or office? How is it that many unite and contribute so coldly and reluctantly for the support of government, learning, and Christian institutions, who so eagerly combine for the prosecution of moneyed speculations, and of party and worldly enterprises? How *is* it, I repeat? Men desire happiness; and a very clear argument may be set forth to show them where their happiness lies. And yet here is presented to you the broad fact—and with this fact I will close the present meditation—that while men's welfare depends mainly on their own minds, they are actually and almost universally seeking it in things without them: that among the objects of actual desire and pursuit, affections and virtues, in the world's esteem, bear no comparison with possessions and honours; nay, that men are every where and every day, sacrificing—ay, sacrificing affections and virtues—sacrificing the dearest treasures of the soul, for what they call goods, and pleasures, and distinctions.

DISCOURSE VII.

SPIRITUAL INTERESTS REAL AND SUPREME.

JOHN VI. 27. LABOUR NOT FOR THE MEAT THAT PERISHETH, BUT FOR THAT MEAT WHICH ENDURETH UNTO ETERNAL LIFE.

THE interests of the mind and heart,—spiritual interests, in other words—the interests involved in religion, are real and supreme. Neglected, disregarded, ridiculed, ruined as they may be—ruined as they may be in mere folly, in mere scorn—they are still real and supreme. Notwithstanding all appearances, delusions, fashions, and opinions to the contrary, this is true, and will be true for ever. All essential interests centre ultimately in the soul; all that do not centre there, are circumstantial, transitory, evanescent; they belong to the things that perish.

This is what I have endeavoured to show this morning, and for this purpose I have appealed in the first place, to society.

My second appeal is to Providence. Society indeed, is a part of the system of Providence; but let me invite you to consider under this head, that the interest of the soul urged in the gospel, is, in every respect, the great object of heaven's care and providence.

The world, which is appointed for our temporary dwelling place, was made for this end. The whole

creation around us, is, to the soul, a subject and a ministering creation. The mighty globe itself, with all its glorious apparatus and furniture, is but a theatre for the care of the soul—the theatre of its redemption. This vast universe is but a means. But look at the earth alone. Why was it made such as it is? Its fruitful soils, its rich valleys, its mountain-tops, and its rolling oceans; its humbler scenes, clothed with beauty and light, good even in the sight of their Maker, fair—fair to mortal eyes—why were they given? They were not given for mere sustenance and supply; for much less would have sufficed for that end. They need not have been so fair to have answered that end. They could have spared their verdure, and flowers, and fragrance, and still have yielded sustenance. The groves might never have waved in the breeze, but have stood in the rigidity of an iron forest; the hills might not have been moulded into forms of beauty, the streams might not have sparkled in their course, nor the ocean have reflected the blue depths of heaven—and yet they might have furnished all needful sustenance. No, they were not given for this alone: but they were given to nourish and kindle in the human soul, a glory and a beauty, of which all outward grandeur and loveliness are but the image—given to show forth the majesty and love of God, and to form in man a resemblance to that majesty and love. Think then, of a being in such a position and with such a ministry, made to be the intelligent companion of God's glorious works, the interpreter of nature, the Lord of the creation—made to be the servant of God alone. And yet this being—Oh! miserable disappointment and failure!—makes himself the slave

of circumstances, the slave of outward goods and advantages, the slave of every thing that he ought to command.

I know that he must toil and care for these things. But wherefore? Why must he toil and care? For a reason, I answer, which still urges upon him the very point we are considering. It had been as easy for the Almighty to have caused nature spontaneously to bring forth all that man needs, to have built as a part of the frame of the earth, enduring houses for us to dwell in, to have filled them with all requisite comforts, and to have relieved us, in short, from the necessity of labour and business. Why has he not done this? Still, I answer, for the same cause, with the same moral design, as that with which the world was made. Activity is designed for mental improvement; industry for moral discipline; business for the cultivation of manly and high and noble virtues. When, therefore, a man enters into the active pursuits of life,—though he pleads the cares of business as an excuse for his neglect,—yet it is then especially, and that by the very teaching of Providence, that he should be reminded of his spiritual welfare. He could not with safety, to his moral being,—this is the theory of his condition—he could not with safety, be turned full and free into the domain of nature. He goes forth, therefore, bearing burdens—burdens of care; and wearing the shackles of necessity. The arm that he stretches out to his toil wears a chain; for he must work. And on the tablet where immortal thoughts are to be written, he writes words,—soon to be erased, indeed, but words of worldly care and foresight, for he *must* provide. And yet, how strange and passing strange is it!—the occu-

pations and objects that were given for discipline, and the trial of the spirit, and the training of it to virtue, are made the ultimate end and the chief good; yes, these which were designed for humble means of good to the soul, are made the engrossing pursuits, the absorbing pleasures and possessions, in which the soul itself is forgotten and lost!

Thus spiritual, in its design, is nature. Thus spiritual, in its just aspects, is the scene of life; no dull scene when rightly regarded; no merely wearisome, uncompensated toil, or perplexing business; but a ministration to purposes of infinite greatness and sublimity.

We are speaking of human interests. God also looks upon the interest of his creatures. But he seeth not as man seeth. Man looketh on the outward appearance, but God looketh on the heart. He sees that all human interests centre there. He sees there, the gathering, the embosoming, the garnering up, of all that is precious to an immortal creature. Therefore, it is, that as the strongest proof of his love to the world, he gave his Son to live for our teaching, and guidance, and to die for our redemption from sin and death and hell. Every bright example, every pure doctrine, every encouraging promise, every bitter pang endured, points to the soul, for its great design and end. And let me say that if I have seemed to any one to speak in language over refined or spiritual, I can no otherwise understand the teachings of the great Master. His words would often be mystery and extravagance to me, if I did not feel, that the soul is every thing, and that the world is nothing but what it is to the soul. With this perception of the true value of things, I require no transcendental piety, I require nothing but

common sense, to understand what he says, when he pronounces men to be deaf, and blind, and diseased and dead in sins. For to give up the joys of the soul for the joys of sense; to neglect the heart, for the outward condition; to forego inward good in the eagerness for visible good; to forget and to forsake God amidst his very works and mercies—this is, indeed, a mournful blindness, a sad disorder of the rational nature, and when the evil is consummated, it is a moral death! True there may be no tears for it, save in here and there one who retires from the crowd, to think of the strange delusion, and the grievous misfortune, and the degrading unworthiness. There are no tokens of public mourning for the calamity of the soul. Men weep when the body dies; and when it is borne to its last rest, they follow it with sad and mournful procession. But for the dying soul there is no open lamentation; for the lost soul there are no obsequies. And yet, when the great account of life is made up—though the words we now speak, can but approach to the truth and may leave but slight impression—the things we may then remember—God forbid, that we should have them to remember!—but the things we *may* then have to remember—life's misdirected toil, the world's delusions, the thoughts unguarded, the conscience every day violated, the soul for ever neglected—these, Oh! these will weigh upon the spirit, like those mountains, which men are represented in prophetic vision as vainly calling upon to cover them.

III. But I am now verging upon the third and final argument which I proposed to use for the care of our spiritual interests, and that is to be found in their value.

I have shown that society in all its pursuits, objects

and scenes urges this care; that nature, and providence and revelation minister to it; and I now say, that the soul is intrinsically and independently worth this care. Put all consequences to social man out of sight, if it be possible; draw a veil over all the bright and glorious ministry of nature; let the teachings of Providence all be silent; let the Gospel be a fable; and still the mind of man has a value which nothing else has; it is worth a care which nothing else is worth; and to the single, solitary individual, it ought to posses an interest which nothing else possesses.

Indeed, at every step by which we advance in this subject, the contrast between what is, and what ought to be, presses upon us. Men very well understand the word, value. They know very well what interests are. Offices, stocks, monopolies, mercantile privileges, are interests. Nay, even the chances of profit, are interests so dear, that men contend for them and about them, almost as if they were striving for life. And value—how carefully and accurately and distinctly is that quality stamped upon every object in this world! Currency has value, and bonds have value, and broad lands, and freighted ships, and rich mines are all marked down in the table of this strict account. Go to the exchange, and you shall know what they are worth; and you shall know what men will give for them. But the stored treasures of the heart, the unsunned, the unfathomable mines that are to be wrought in the soul, the broad and boundless realms of thought, the freighted ocean of man's affections—of his love, his gratitude, his hope—who will regard them?—who seek for them, as if they were brighter than gold, dearer than treasure?

The mind, I repeat—how little is it known or considered! That all which man permanently is,—the inward being, the divine energy, the immortal thought, the boundless capacity, the infinite aspiration—how few value this, this wonderful mind, for what it is worth! How few see it—that brother mind—in others; see it in all the forms of splendour and wretchedness alike—see it, though fenced around with all the artificial distinctions of society—see it, through the rags with which poverty has clothed it, beneath the crushing burthens of life, amidst the close pressure of worldly troubles, wants and sorrows—see it, and acknowledge and cheer it in that humble lot, and feel that the nobility of earth, that the commencing glory of heaven is there! Nor is this the worst, nor the strongest view of the case. Men do not feel the worth of their own minds. They are very proud perhaps; they are proud of their possessions; they are proud of their *minds*, it may be, as distinguishing them; but the intrinsic, the inward, the infinite *worth* of their own minds they do not perceive. How many a man is there who would feel, if he were introduced into some magnificent palace, and were led through a succession of splendid apartments, filled with rich and gorgeous furniture—would feel, I say, as if he, lofty, immortal being as he is, were but an ordinary thing amidst the tinselled show around him; or would feel as if he were a more ordinary being, for the perishing glare of things, amidst which he walked! How many a man, who, as he passed along the way-side, saw the chariot of wealth rolling by him, would forget the intrinsic and eternal dignity of his own mind, in a poor, degrading envy of that vain pageant—would feel himself to be an

humbler creature, because, not in mind, but in mensuration, he was not quite so high! And so long as this is the case, do you believe that men understand their own minds, that they know what they possess within them? How many, in fact, feel as if that inward being, that mind, were respectable, chiefly, because their bodies lean on silken couches, and are fed with costly luxuries! How many respect themselves, and look for respect from others, in proportion, as they grow more rich, and live more splendidly, not more wisely,—and fare more sumptuously every day! Surely it is not strange, while all this is true, that men should be more attracted by objects of sense and appetite, than by miracles of wisdom and love. And it is not strange that the spiritual riches which man is exhorted to seek, are represented in scripture as "hid treasures;" for they are indeed hidden in the depths of the soul—hidden, covered up, with worldly gains, and pomps, and vanities. It is not strange that the kingdom of heaven, that kingdom which is within, is represented as a treasure buried in a field: the flowers bloom and the long grass waves there, and men pass by and say it is beautiful; but this very beauty, this very luxuriance conceals the treasure. And so it is in this life, that luxury and show, fashion and outward beauty, worldly pursuits and possessions, attract the eyes of men and they know not the treasure that is hidden in every human soul.

Yes, the treasure—and the treasure that is in every soul. The difference that exists among men, is not so much in their nature, not so much in their intrinsic power, as in the power of communication. To some it is given to unbosom and embody their thoughts; but

all men, more or less, feel those thoughts. The very glory of genius, the very rapture of piety, when rightly revealed, are diffused and spread abroad, and shared among unnumbered minds. When eloquence, and poetry speak;—when the glorious arts, statuary and painting and music; when patriotism, charity, virtue, speak to us, with all their thrilling power, do not the hearts of thousands glow with a kindred joy and ecstasy? Who's here so humble, who so poor in thought, or in affection, as not to feel this? Who's here so low, so degraded, I had almost said, as not sometimes to be touched with the beauty of goodness? Who's here with a heart made of such base materials, as not sometimes to respond through every chord of it, to the call of honour, patriotism, generosity, virtue? What a glorious capacity is this!—a power to commune with God and angels!—a reflection of the brightness of heaven—a mirror that collects and concentrates within itself all the moral splendours of the universe—a light kindled from heaven, that is to shine brighter and brighter for ever! For what then, my friends, shall we care as we ought to care for this? What can man bear about with him,—what office, what array, what apparel—that shall beget such reverence as the soul he bears with him? What circumstances of outward splendour can lend such imposing dignity to any being, as the throne of inward light and power, where the spirit reigns for ever? What work of man shall be brought into comparison with this work of God? I will speak of it in its simplest character—I say, a thought, a bare thought,—and yet I say, what is it—and what is its power and mystery? Breathed from the inspiration of the Almighty; partaking of infinite attributes; com-

prehending, analyzing, and with its own beauty clothing all things; and bringing all things and all themes, —earth, heaven, eternity,—within the possession of its momentary being; what is there that man can form,—what sceptre or throne,—what structure of ages—what empire of wide-spread dominion—can compare with the wonders and the grandeurs of a single thought? It is that alone of all things that are made,—it is that alone, that comprehends the Maker of all. That alone is the key, which unlocks all the treasures of the universe. That alone is the power that reigns over space, time, eternity. That, under God, is the sovereign dispenser to man, of all the blessings and glories, that lie within the compass of possession, or within the range of possibility. Virtue, piety, heaven, immortality, exist not, and never will exist for us, but as they exist, and will exist in the perception, feeling, *thought* —of the glorious mind.

Indeed, it is the soul alone that gives any value to the things of this world; and it is only by raising the soul to its just elevation above all other things, that we can look rightly upon the purposes of this life. This to my apprehension, is not only a most important, but a most practical view of the subject.

I have heard men say that they could not look upon this life as a blessing. I have heard it more than insinuated, I have known it to be actually implied in solemn prayers to God, that it is a happiness to die in infancy. And nothing, you are aware, is more common than to hear it said, that youth, unreflecting youth, is the happy season of life. And when by reason of sickness or the infirmities of age, men outlive their activity and their sensitive happiness, nothing is more

common than to look upon the continuance of life in these circumstances, as a misfortune.

Now I do not wonder at these views so long as men are as worldly as they usually are. I wonder that they do not prevail more. "Oh! patient and peaceable men that ye are!" I have been ready to say to the mere men of this world—"peaceable men and patient! what is it that bears you up? What is it but a blind and instinctive love of life, that can make you content to live?" But let the soul have its proper ascendency in our judgments, and all the mighty burthen is relieved. Life is then the education of the soul, the discipline of conscience, virtue, piety. All things then, are subordinate to this sublime purpose. Life is, then, one scene of growing knowledge, improvement, devotion, joy and triumph. In this view and in this view only, it is an unspeakable blessing; and those who have not yet taken this view, who have not yet given the soul its just pre-eminence, who have not yet become spiritually-minded, are not yet prepared to live. It is not enough to say, as is commonly said, that they are not prepared to die; they are not prepared to *live.*

I would not address this matter my friends, merely to your religious sensibility; I would address it to your common sense. It is a most serious and practical matter. There are many things in this world, as I have more than once said, which are called interests. But he who has not regarded his soul as he ought, who has gained no deep sense of things that are spiritual, has neglected the main interest, the chief use of this life, the grand preparation for living calmly, wisely, and happily. It is a thousand times more serious for him, than if he had been negligent about property, about honour, or about worldly connections and friendships.

With this reasonable subjection of the body to the soul, with this supreme regard to the soul as the guiding light of life, every man would feel that this life is a blessing; and that the continuance of it is a blessing. He would be thankful for its continuance with a fervour which no mere love of life could inspire; for life to him, and every day of it, would be a glorious progress, in things infinitely more precious than life. He would not think the days of unreflecting youth, the happiest days. He would not think that the continuance of his being upon earth, even beyond active usefulness to others, was a misfortune, or a mystery. He would not be saying, "why is my life lengthened out?" He would feel that every new day of life spread before him glorious opportunities to be improved, glorious objects to be gained. He would not sink down in miserable ennui or despondency. He would not faint or despair, or be overwhelmed with doubt, amidst difficulties and afflictions. He would feel that the course of his life, even though it pass on through clouds and storms, is glorious as the path of the sun.

Thus have I endeavoured to show that the care of the soul is the most essential of all human interests. Let no worldly man think himself wise. He might be a wise animal; but he is not a wise man. Nay, I cannot admit even that. For being what he is—animal or man, call him what you will,—it is as truly essential, that he should work out the salvation of his soul; as it is, that he should work with his hands for his daily bread. How reasonable then is our Saviour's exhortation, when he says, "Labour, therefore, not for the meat which perisheth, but for that which endureth unto everlasting life."

DISCOURSE VIII.

ON RELIGIOUS SENSIBILITY.*

EZEKIEL 36, 26. AND I WILL GIVE YOU A HEART OF FLESH.

THE subject to which I wish to invite your thoughts in this discourse, is that religious sensibility, that spiritual fervour, in other words, that "heart of flesh," which is spoken of in the text.

To a sincere, and at the same time, rational cultivator of his religious affections, it seems at first view, a thing almost unaccountable, that Christians, apparently serious and faithful, should every where be found complaining of the want of religious feeling; that the grand, universal, standing complaint of almost the entire body of Christians, should be a complaint of dulness. To one, who has studied the principles of his own nature, or observed its tendencies; who knows that, as visible beauty is made to delight the eye, so moral beauty is made to delight the mind; it seems a tremendous moral solecism, that all the affec-

* The substance of the two following discourses was addressed to the graduating class, in the Theological Department of Harvard University, in 1834. This circumstance will account for the form that is given to some of the topics and illustrations.

tions of this nature and mind, should become cold and dead, the moment they are directed to the Infinite Beauty and Glory. It will not solve the problem to say that human nature is depraved. If, indeed, the depravity of men were such, that all enthusiasm for excellence had died out in the world, the general reason assigned might satisfy us. But what is the fact? What is the beauty of nature, but a beauty clothed with moral associations? What is the highest beauty of literature, poetry, fiction, and the fine arts, but a moral beauty which genius has bodied forth for the admiration of the world? And what are those qualities of the human character which are treasured up in the memory and heart of nations—the objects of universal reverence and exultation, the themes of celebration, of eloquence, and of festal song, the enshrined idols of human admiration and love? Are they not patriotism, heroism, philanthropy, disinterestedness, magnanimity, martyrdom?

And yet the Being, from whom all earthly beauty and human excellence are emanations, and of whom they are faint resemblances, is the very Being whom men tell us that they cannot heartily and constantly love: and the subject which is held most especially to connect us with that Being, is the very subject in which men tell us they cannot be heartily interested. No observing pastor of a religious congregation who has been favoured with the intimacy of one mind awaking to this subject, can fail to know that this is the grand complaint. The difficulty about feeling, is the first great difficulty; and it is one which presses upon every after step of the religious course. Few arrive at that point where they can say with the apos-

tle "I *know* in whom I have believed." The common language and tone in which even religious confidence is expressed, do not go beyond such distrustful and desponding words as these—"I hope that I love God; I hope I have an interest in religion;" alas! how different from the manner in which, friendship, love, domestic affection, breathe themselves into the ear, and thrill through the heart of the world!

It seems especially strange, that this complaint of dulness should be heard in places devoted to the acquisition of religious knowledge, and the cultivation of religious affection; and yet it is, perhaps, no where more common or emphatic. And it is confined to no one species of religious seminaries; it is confined, I mean, to no one sect. I have heard it in tones as emphatic from Catholic and Calvinistic seminaries, as from any other. I have heard it as strongly expressed in other lands, as in our own. But is it not very extraordinary? We hear it not from the studios of artists. We hear it not from the schools of law and medicine. There is no complaint of dulness, there is no want of enthusiasm, about their appropriate objects in any of these. He, whose mind is occupied with the most abstruse questions of science or of the law; he, who gazes upon a painting, or upon a statue—ay, and he who gazes upon a skeleton, does not complain that he cannot be interested in them. I have heard such an one say, "beautiful! beautiful!" in a case where admiration seemed almost absurd; where it provoked a smile from the observer. And yet in schools—in schools of ardent youth—where the subject of attention is the supreme and infinite Beauty, if we may take confession for evidence—I do not say it is yours,

my brethren, but I have often heard it from persons situated as you are—yes, among such persons, if we may take confession for evidence—all is cold and dead.

But I *must* here, and before I go any further, put forward one qualification. I do not think that confession *is* to be taken for evidence, altogether, and without any qualification. One reason, doubtless, why Christians complain so much of the want of feeling, is to be found in the very sense which they entertain of the infinite value and greatness of the objects of their faith. And it is unquestionably true that there is often a great deal of feeling in cases where there are very sad lamentations over the want of it. Lamentation certainly does not prove total insensibility.

Still, however, there is an acknowledged deficiency; not appertaining to any one class or condition, but to the entire body of Christians. And it is especially a deficiency of *natural*, *hearty*, *genuine*, *deep* sensibility. And, once more, it is deficiency, sad, strange, and inexcusable, on a subject more than all others claiming our sensibility. And yet again, it is a deficiency which, when existing on the part of the clergy, is most deplorable in its consequences. It is therefore every body's interest, and that for every reason, to consider what are the causes, and what are the remedies of this peculiar, prevailing, religious insensibility.

I have some question, indeed, whether this demand for sensibility—the popular rage that is to say for feeling, feeling alone—is not, in some views, mistaken, excessive, and wrong. But let me admit, for I

cannot resist, the strength, the supremacy of the claim, which religion has on our whole heart. The first and lawful demand of the mind awakened to religion, is to feel it. The last attainment, is to feel it deeply, rationally, constantly. Of the awakened mind, the first consciousness always is—"I do not feel; I never did feel this subject as I ought. It claims to be felt. The solemn authority and the unspeakable goodness of God; the great prospect of immortality; the strong bond of duty upon my nature; the infinite welfare of my soul—these are themes, if there be any such, upon which I ought to feel." The mind, thus aroused from worldly neglect to the greatest of subjects, will feel its coldness, its indifference to be a dreadful burthen; and it will sigh for deliverance: and the preacher who has never such a mind to deal with, may well doubt whether he is preaching to any purpose. And in all its after course, it will hold a fervent religious sensibility to be indispensable to its peace. If its prayers are formal and heartless, if its love waxes cold, if its gratitude and humility are destitute of warmth and tenderness, it cannot be satisfied.

And it ought not to be satisfied. This demand for feeling in religion, I say, is right; it is just; and I am desirous, in this discourse, to meet it and to deal with it as such. And yet I am about to say in the first place, that there are mistakes about it, and that in these mistakes are to be found some of the causes of the prevailing religious insensibility.

I. Is there not something wrong, then, in the first place—is there not something prejudicial to the very end in view, in this vehement demand of feeling? I have said that it is mainly right, and that I intend

so to regard it. But may there not be some mistake in the case? May not the demand for feeling sometimes be made to the prejudice of feeling, and to the prejudice, also, of real, practical virtue? I confess that I have been led at times to suspect, that the craving of some for great religious feeling in the preacher, though right in fact, yet was partly wrong in their minds. A person conscious of great religious deficiency, conscious of weekly and daily aberrations from the right rule and the religious walk, will be glad, of course, to have his feelings aroused on the Sabbath; it gives him a better opinion of himself; it puts him on a better footing with his conscience; it, somehow, brings up the moral account, and enables him to go on, as if the state of his affairs were very well and prosperous. This, perhaps, explains the reason, if such indeed be the fact, why in some cases, a very pathetic and fervent preacher seems to do less good, than a man of much inferior endowments. In this latter case, the congregation cannot depend upon the periodical and passive excitement, and is obliged to resort to something else—to some religious activity of its own.

It appears to me also that the great religious excitements of the day answer the same purpose, however unintentionally, of keeping the people satisfied with general coldness and negligence.

But I was about to observe that this urgent demand for feeling, is probably one of the causes of religious insensibility. That is to say, the directness, urgency, and reiteration of the demand, are unfavourable to a compliance with it. This importunity with regard to feeling does not allow it to spring up in the natural

way. If it were applied to feeling on any other subject,—to friendship, filial attachment, or parental affection—how certainly would it fail of success! Human feeling, in its genuine character, can never be forced, urged, compelled, or exhorted, into action. The pulpit, I believe, has occasion to take a lesson from this principle of analogy. It is not the way to make the people feel, to be telling them constantly that they *must* feel, to be complaining continually of their coldness, to be threatening them perpetually with heaven's judgments upon their insensibility. And he who has used only these methods of awakening emotion, need not wonder that the people have no feeling about religion. No, let the preacher himself feel; let him express his feeling, not as if he had any design upon the feelings of others, but as if he could not help it; let him do this, and he will find hearts that sympathize with him. The chill of death may have been upon them, it may have been upon them for years; the rock may never have been smitten, the desert never cheered; but there is a holy unction, a holy unction of feeling, which is irresistible. It is like the rod of miracles in the hand of Moses; the waters will flow at its touch; and there will be life and luxuriance and beauty, where all was barrenness and desolation before.

I do not say that there will, of necessity, be actual regeneration, in the heart where this feeling is excited; I do not say that there will certainly be fruit, where all this verdure and beauty are seen: for the importance of feeling is often exaggerated to that degree that it is made a substitute for practical virtue. And thus the mistake we are considering, is made unfavourable to religious sensibility in another way. For, although, at

first view, it seems to favour sensibility to make so much of it; although in fact it exaggerates its importance; yet, as the nature of the exaggeration is to make feeling all-sufficient of itself, the effect, of course, is to draw off attention from that basis of principle and habit, which are essential to the strength and permanency of feeling. This is—so much to admire the beauty and luxuriance of vegetation in one's field, as to forget and neglect the very soil from which it springs. Of course the luxuriance and beauty will soon fade away. And so the common religious sensibility, is like the seed which was sown upon stony places; forthwith it springs up because it has no deepness of earth; and because it has no root, it withers away. Or, it is like the torrent after a shower. There has been a commotion in the moral elements of society; there have been thunderings in heaven, and an outpouring from the skies; and fresh streams are gushing forth and flowing on every side; and how many, in their agitation, their enthusiasm, and their zeal, will mistake these noisy freshets, for the deep, pure, silent, ever-flowing river of life!

Nay, this vehement demand for feeling tends to throw an interested and mercenary character over it, which are also extremely unfavourable to its cultivation. There is that trait of nobleness still left in human nature, that it will not barter its best affections for advantage. He who is striving with all his might to feel, only because feeling will save him, is certain to fail. This is the reason why none are ever found so bitterly complaining of the want of feeling, as men often are, in the midst of a great religious excitement. They see the community around them, aroused to

great emotion; they are told that this is the way to be saved; the fear of perdition presses upon them; under this selfish fear, they strive, they agonize, they goad themselves, they would give the world to feel; and the result is, that they can *feel nothing!* Their complaint is, and it is true, that their heart is as cold as a stone. No;—men must feel religion, if at all, because it is right to feel it. The great subject of religion must sink into their hearts; in retirement, in silence, without agitation, without any thought of advantage. They must feel if at all, involuntarily; they must feel, as it were, because they cannot help feeling.

This, too, is one of the reasons, as I believe, why there is so little religious sensibility, in theological seminaries. There is a perpetual demand for sensibility; society demands it; religious congregations demand it; the student is constantly reminded by his fellows, by every body, that he cannot succeed without it, that his eloquence, his popularity depends upon it; and every such consideration tends directly to chill his heart. He is ashamed to cultivate feeling under such influences. Let him, then, forget all this; let him forget that it is his interest, almost that it is his duty, to feel; let him sit down in silence and meditation; let him spread the great themes of religion before him, and with deep attention, ay, with the deep attention of prayer, let him ponder them; and he will find that which he did not seek; he will find that feeling is the least thing, the easiest thing, the most inevitable thing, in his experience.

II. In the second place, there are mistakes—and they arise in part, from the one already stated,—concerning the characteristics and expressions of religious

sensibility; and these mistakes, too, like the former, are unfriendly to its cultivation.

I shall not think it necessary to dwell long upon this topic—or, at least, not upon its more obvious aspects. Every one, unhappily, is but too familiar with the extravagancies, and the extravagant manifestations, of religious feeling. They are as public, as they are common. Their effect, in repelling and estranging the feelings of multitudes from religion, is no less clear.

In a celebrated volume of Essays published some years ago, you will remember one, "On the aversion of men of taste to Evangelical religion." The aversion is there taken for granted; and, indeed, it is sufficiently evident. Whether the taste be right, or the religion be right, the fact of their contrariety is indisputable. The whole body of our classic English literature—that literature with which the great mass of readers is constantly communing and sympathizing—is stamped with nothing more clearly, than an aversion to what is called Evangelical religion. The peculiarities of its creed, of its feelings, of its experiences, of its manners, of its tones of speech, have all been alike offensive to that taste, which is inspired by the mass of our best English reading.

But the effect unhappily does not stop with repelling the mind from religion in the Evangelical form. It repels the mind from religion in every form. And more especially it begets a great distrust of all religious earnestness. Hence all the solicitude there is, especially among the cultivated classes, to have every thing sober, calm, rational, in religion. Hence the alarm that is so easily taken, at every appearance of zeal and enthusiasm. It seems to be thought by many

that there *can* be no religious earnestness, but what breaks out into extravagance and fanaticism. If they had not identified two things, essentially different, they would be no more afraid of enthusiasm in religion, than they are afraid of enthusiasm in science, in literature, in the arts. It would be, in their account, a noble and beautiful thing. But now, the very description of a person as "zealous in his religion" carries with it, a kind of imputation upon his understanding and liberality. Hence, in the train of consequences, it comes to pass that many are cold in religion. "For this cause, many sleep." They apparently think it better to sleep in security, than to wake in distraction; they prefer stupor to madness; they had rather perish in their senses, than in a fit of insanity; this, at least, is the light in which matters appear to them; and how is it strange, that, repelled by the ordinary forms of religious emotion, and identifying all religious feeling with these, they should sink down into a cold, chilling, cheerless insensibility.

But I must not leave it to be supposed, that men of taste and refinement alone, are exposed to this result. The truth is that the popular sensibility on this subject has been itself deficient in real strength and true fervour; it has been remarkable thus far, for wanting those qualities, which were necessary to give it depth and impressiveness in its own sphere: and from no quarter have there been more bitter complaints of coldness, than from the very sphere of fanaticism. The observation may seem to be a singular one, perhaps, and the fact scarcely credible. But if you will take the pains to observe, I am confident you will find it to be true, that the wildest sects and the wildest

excitements are precisely those, from which there come from time to time, the deepest confessions of coldness and stupidity. Yes, in the bosom of fanaticism is harboured the deepest and most painful doubt, about the truth and reality of all religion. And the reason is, that neither there, nor in any of the modifications of spiritual extravagance, has religion been familiar enough, to have become an easy, natural, abiding guest; nor reflective enough to have settled down into a principle and habit; nor has it long enough rested in the soul, amidst quietness and silence, to have become incorporated with its nature.

And thus it comes to pass, that in many, perhaps, in most minds, where religion gains admission, it is felt to be a strange, mysterious, extraordinary thing. I think, indeed, that the religious experience of the world, generally, has not got beyond this point; it is still an extraordinary thing. And it is obvious, that this sense of its being extraordinary, will not be favourable to composure, steadiness, and permanency of feeling, but rather to excitement, wonder, delight, and all those tumultuous emotions that speedily pass away.

I am afraid, too, that this consciousness of religious experience as being something extraordinary, has another injurious and repulsive effect: that is to say, that it gives birth to that religious vanity, that spiritual pride, that sense of personal importance, which is so apt to spring up with religious zeal. I know, indeed, that the Gospel demands humility; and I know that Christians have been much given to self-disparagement; but I know, too, that no sooner does a man "obtain religion," to use the common phrase, than his own sense of the great and wonderful thing which he

conceives has happened to him, and the attentions of those around him, usually contribute to invest him with a very disagreeable air of self-importance. There is a strange delusion, by which a man contrives to think himself very humble, and to be very proud, at the same time. He says that he is the greatest of sinners, a most wonderful instance of the triumph of divine grace; and perhaps he is never so proud as when he says it. His confession is made, with a saving clause; and the saving clause is very likely to be more with him, than the confession. He is the greatest of sinners; but then he is rescued. He is a most extraordinary instance of grace; but then it follows certainly, that he is himself a very extraordinary person.

Whether this be a just account of the matter or not, it is certain that spiritual vanity has been, thus far, in the world, one of the prevailing forms of religious experience. And since this quality,—I mean, vanity—whether religious or otherwise, is always one the most offensive and insufferable; since it always brings more unpopularity upon its possessor, I had almost said, than all other bad qualities put together, it is not strange that it should have brought some discredit upon religion, and especially upon religious zeal and earnestness. There are—there must be, not a few, who will stand aside and aloof, and say, "let me have no religion rather than that:" and one of the most important duties of religious teaching is, to show them that they *may* have religion without presumption, pride, or ostentation; nay and that the religion, which they hold in simplicity, modesty, and singleness of heart, with no thought of others, with no thought of themselves, will be far more deep, thorough and fervent, as well as far more graceful and beautiful.

There is one effect of this sense of religion as something very extraordinary, which I must mention before leaving this topic; and that is upon the manifestations of religious sensibility. The sense of the extraordinary tends to give expansion and exuberance to the expression of religious feeling—tends, if the phrase will be understood, to too much manifestation. Our sensibility always takes arms against an appearance of this sort. This explains the reason, why some religious conversation and some preaching, which seems to be charged and overcharged with religious fervour, which vents itself, perhaps, in a passion of tears, which is full of exclamations and entreaties, and exhorts us to feel with every moving interjection in the language, yet never moves us at all. The precise reason is that the expression is overcharged. We wonder at our insensibility perhaps; we think it is very wicked in us not to feel; but the fact is, we are, all this while, true to nature. Possibly some might think, though I will not suspect any one who hears me, of holding the opinion, that this apology ought not to be stated; that self-reproach is so rare a thing, and so good a thing, that men should be left to accuse themselves as much as ever they will. I confess that I can understand no such reasoning as this. On the contrary I have regretted to hear the language of self-reproach in such cases; because I do not think it just, and because, I know, that every false self-accusation, tends to blunt the edge of the true self-accusation. Doubtless, men should always feel religion if they can; but the question is now, about being made to feel it, by a particular manifestation. And, I say, if the manifestation be overcharged; if it go beyond the feeling, rather than

come short of it; if there be more expression, vociferation, gesture, than genuine emotion, it will inevitably, with the discerning, have an effect the very contrary of what was intended. No; let one speak to us by our fireside, or in the pulpit, with an emotion which he is obliged to restrain; let it appear evident, that he lays a check upon his feelings; let one stand before us,—I care not with what varied expression—with the cheek flushed or blanched, with the tear suppressed or flowing, with the voice soft or loud, only so that the expression never seem to outrun, to exceed the feeling; and he is almost as sure of our sympathy, as that we are human beings.

The observation I have made on this point cannot be useless to any one, if it teaches only this, that nothing forced, or factitious will answer any good purpose in religion; that if we would accomplish any thing for ourselves or others in this great cause, we must engage in it with our whole heart; that the sources of real religious influence, are none other than the fountains of the heart—the fountains of honest, earnest, irrepressible sensibility.

III. I must now add, in the third place, that there are mistakes, as in the vehement demand for religious sensibility, and concerning its nature and expressions, so also with regard to its Supreme Object.

We must allow indeed that, on this point, there are some intrinsic difficulties. There are difficulties attending the love of an Infinite, Eternal, Invisible, Incomprehensible Being. Our love of him, must be divested of many of those sympathies, and supports, which enkindle and strengthen in us, the love of one another. We feel obliged to guard every word in

which we speak of him, and of our connection with him. We must not say that our communion with him, is sympathy; or that our love of him is attachment. We may not, with propriety, say that he is "dear" to us. Many, indeed, of those phrases, many of those modes of expression, in which we testify the strength and charm of our social affections, sink into awe and are hushed to silence, before that Infinite and Awful Being. So at least, does the subject of devotion appear to me; and I must confess that the familiarity of expression which is sometimes witnessed in prayer, is extremely irreverent and shocking.

But those difficulties which it is the tendency of ignorance and fanaticism to overlook, it is the tendency of immature reflection and philosophy to magnify. Reflection has gone just so far with some minds as to make it more difficult for them, than it ought to be, to approach their Maker. They regard his exaltation above them, as distance; his greatness, as separation from them. They look upon the very phrases, "love of God," "communion with God," as phrases of daring import, and doubtful propriety. They shrink back from the freedom of popular language, and this perhaps, they rightly do; but they retreat too far—they retreat to the opposite extreme of coldness, and cold abstractions. They are sometimes almost afraid to address God as a Being; they worship some mighty abstraction; they are like those ancient philosophers who worshipped the light; they worship "an unknown God." I do not know that any thing but the teachings of Jesus, could ever have cured this error; the error at once of ancient philosophy and modern refinement. He "has brought us nigh to God." He has taught us

that God is our father. He has taught us to worship him, with the profoundest reverence, indeed, but with boundless confidence and love. He has taught us, that God does regard us; that he does look down, from the height of his infinite heavens—that he does look down upon us, and upon our world—not exclusively, as some religionists would teach, not as if there were no other world—but still that he does look down upon *us*, and *our* world, with paternal interest and kindness.

The mistake now stated is one which lies at the very threshold of devotion. But when we enter the temple of our worship, how many errors are there, that darken its light and disfigure its beauty! The veil of the Jewish peculiarity is indeed rent in twain; but theology has lifted up other, and many, and darkening veils, before "the holy of holies." Our sins, too, have separated between us and God, and our iniquities have hidden his face from us. Unworthy, afraid, superstitious, erring, grovelling in the dust, how can we love God, purely, freely, joyfully! How, even, can we *see* the perfection of God, as we ought!

This, indeed, is the point upon which all difficulty presses. *Men do not* SEE *the perfection of God.* They do not identify that perfection, with all that is glorious, beautiful, lovely, admirable, and enrapturing, in nature, in character, in life, in existence. God's glory, they conceive to be something so different from all other glory; God's goodness, so different from all other goodliness and beauty, that they find no easy transition from one to the other. They mistake—and perhaps this is the most fatal part of the error—they mistake the very demand of God's goodness upon their love. They conceive of it, as if there were something arbi-

trary, and importunate, and selfish, in the demand. Demand itself repels them; because they do not understand it. They think of the Supreme Being in this attitude, somewhat as they would of a man, if he stood before them, saying, "love me; give me your heart; upon pain of my displeasure, and of long-enduring penal miseries for your disobedience." Divine goodness, thus regarded, does not, and cannot, steal into the heart, as the excellence of a human being does. And this, I say, is a mistake. Divine goodness, thus regarded, is mistaken—misapprehended altogether. There is not so much that is personal in God's claim for our hearts, as there is in man's claim. It does not so much concern him, if I may speak so, that we should love him personally, as it concerns man, that we should love him personally. He is not dependent on our love, as man is dependent upon it. The command which he lays upon us to love him, is but a part of the command to love all goodness. He equally commands us to love one another. Nay, he has graciously represented the want of love to one another, as the evidence of want of love to him. He has thus, in a sense, identified these affections; and thus taught us, that an affection for excellence, whether in himself or in his creatures, is essentially the affection that he demands. The demand for our love, which the infinite Being addresses to us, is infinitely generous. He requires us to love all goodness—to love it alike in himself and in others—to love goodness, for goodness' sake—to love it because it is just that we should love it, because it is right, because it is for our welfare, because, in one word, it is all our excellence and all our happiness.

I must not dwell longer upon these mistakes; but, in leaving this topic, let me exhort every one, to endeavour to correct them. With many, this will require a frequent, an almost constant, effort. The influence of early education or of later error; theology, superstition and sin, have so overshadowed their path, that they must not expect to see the light, without much faithful endeavour. Let them be entreated by every thing most precious to them, to make it. And *thus* let them make the endeavour. *Let them see God in every thing that they lawfully admire and love.* If there be any goodliness and loveliness in the world; if there be any thing dear and delightful in the excellence of good men; if heaven from its majestic heights, if earth from its lowly beauty, sends one sweet, or one sublime thought into your mind—think, that this is a manifestation of the ever-beautiful, ever-blessed perfection of God. *Think*, I say emphatically, and let not your mind sleep—think for ever, that the whole universe of glory and beauty, is one revelation of God. Think thus, I say,—thus faithfully and perseveringly; and you will find, that no strength nor freedom of emotion in the world, is like the freedom and strength of devotion; that no joy, no rapture on earth, is like the joy, the rapture of piety!

DISCOURSE IX.

ON RELIGIOUS SENSIBILITY.

EZEKIEL, 36, 26. And I will give you a heart of flesh.

My object in the present discourse, is to offer some remarks upon the remedies, for the want of religious sensibility; or upon the means and principles of its culture.

And in entering upon this subject, I would say, that much is to be done by a correction of those mistakes which have been already mentioned. Let then something, I would venture to say, of this vehement demand for feeling be abated. Let not the feelings of religion be subjected to perpetual importunity, any more than the feelings of friendship, or of family affection. Let not feeling be made to occupy a place in religion that does not belong to it, as if it were the only thing and every thing—thus drawing away attention from the principles that are necessary to give it permanency, from the soil that must nourish, and the basis that must support it. Let not religious feeling be appealed to in a way to impair its simplicity, disinterestedness, and purity.

In the next place, let the common mistakes about the nature and signs of religious sensibility be corrected. Let all excess and extravagance be checked as much as possible; and especially let those who would cultivate a

fervent piety, make the necessary discriminations between religion and fanaticism. Let them not conclude that abuses are the only forms, under which the religious principle can appear; that, in order to be zealous Christians, it is necessary to part with their modesty, or their taste. In fine, let religion become so familiar that it shall cease to be, in their minds, or in their thoughts of it, any thing extraordinary; and then let its manifestations be, like the expressions of all other high and pure feeling, unforced, natural, manly, strong, graceful, beautiful, and winning. Thus let our light shine before men, not as the glaring meteor, but as the common light of day, attractive and cheering and constant.

And once more, let an honest and persevering endeavour be made, to correct those mistakes that prevail about the Supreme Object, to which religious sensibility is chiefly directed. Let not God be regarded as some unintelligible abstraction, or inaccessible majesty. Let the Christian teaching be welcomed; which instructs us to believe and to feel that He is our Father. Let an effort be made by every mind to break through the clouds of superstition and sin, and to perceive what the divine perfection is. Let not God's command that we should love him be mistaken for any thing more arbitrary or importunate or personal, than is the claim of disinterested human excellence to be loved. Let not the divine demand for our love, be so construed, as to chill or repel our love. In fine, let no thought be suffered to enter our minds that shall detract from the infinite generosity, the infinite dignity, the infinite beauty, of the divine perfection. How shall God be truly loved, if he is not

rightly known! Let him be rightly known; and love will as certainly follow, as it will follow the knowledge of any other—of any human or angelic excellence. I do not say that it will certainly follow, but *as* certainly. Nay, why, if we rightly understood the subject, should it not be easier to love God, than to love man? For man is full of imperfection that offends us, and with him too we are liable to have questions and competitions. But God is all-perfect; and with him, our affections have nothing to do—but to love him.

Let me now proceed to offer a few suggestions more directly, upon the remedy for religious insensibility. And here let me say, at once, that I have no specific to offer in the shape of a remedy; no new, and before unheard of method to propose. I have no set of rules to lay down, a mere formal observance of which will certainly bring about the desired result. Religious sensibility is to be cultivated like all other sensibility—i. e. rationally. And since it is impossible within my present limits to discuss the subject in all its parts and bearings, I shall confine myself to the defence and application of the rational method. And the rational method is the method of attention, in the forms of meditation, reading, hearing, prayer; the method of association, which pays regard to the indirect influences of places, times, and moods of mind; and finally it is the method of consistency, by which no feeling is expected to be strong and satisfactory, but as the result of the whole character.

My remedy, then, for religious insensibility, under the blessing of heaven—it might sound strangely in the ears of some—but I boldly say that my remedy is reason. It is thought; it is reflection; it is attention;

it is exercise of reason in every legitimate way. The true method, I say, is purely and strictly rational. And I say, moreover, that it is not that Christians have used their reason so much, but so little, that they have been so deficient in real feeling.

Reason and feeling if they be not the same thing in different degrees of strength, are yet so intimately connected, that no man may ever expect, on any subject, to feel deeply and habitually, who does not feel rationally. The slight sometimes thrown upon reason in religion, is an invasion of the first law of the mind, the first law of heaven. This law is "elder scripture," and no more designed to be abrogated by the written word, than the law of gravitation is designed to be abrogated by the written word. The word proceeds upon the assumption, that the intellect is to be addressed: it actually, and every where, addresses it. The whole theory of human affections proceeds upon it. The grandest theoretical mistake of all in religion, is that by which feeling is separated from the intellect.

Nor am I at all sure, my brethren, little liable as it may be thought we are to the mistake, that we have altogether escaped it. When it is said, as it sometimes is said, that certain preaching is too intellectual for a plain congregation, or too rational for an humble congregation, I must think, either that the meaning is false; or that the terms are used in a false sense. There never was too much intellect—there never was too much reason, yet put into a sermon. There may have been too little feeling; but it does not follow, that there was too much reason. There may have been too much barren and useless speculation,

but not too much intellect. Some of the most practical and devotional books in the world—such as Law's Serious Call, Baxter's Saints' Rest, the Sermons of Bishop Butler, and of Dr. Paley, and the Works of Leighton,—are specimens of the closest reasoning. A genuine, just, and powerful moral discourse, has need to be one of the keenest, closest, and most discriminating compositions in the world. Such were the discourses of our Saviour. Nothing could be farther from loose, rambling, common-place exhortations. Nothing could be farther from that style, which says, "Oh! my hearers, you must be good; you must be pious men; and you must feel on this great subject." No, the hearers, by close, cogent, home-put argument, were made to feel; and they said, "never man spake like this man."

I may be thought singular, but I verily believe, that in most moral discourses at this day, the grand defect is not so much a defect of feeling, as it is a defect of close and discriminating argument; and that higher powers of argumentation are precisely what are wanted, in such sermons, to make them more weighty, practical, and impressive. And it is not the intellectual hearer, who can perhaps supply the deficiency, that most needs this; but the plain hearer who is mystified, mislead, and stupified, by the want of clear and piercing discrimination. I have that respect for human nature in its humblest forms, as to think that the highest powers of man or angel, would not be thrown away upon it: and I cannot believe that nothing but truisms and common-places, vague generalities and unstudied exhortations, are required in teaching religion to such a nature.

It is required of a man, to be sure, according to what he hath, and not according to what he hath not. But if it be thought that the utmost, and far more than the utmost measure, of human talent, may not be well employed in religious discussion, how let me ask, is that opinion to be defended against the charge of doing dishonour to religion? There is no other interest which is not held to be worthy of the profoundest discussion. He who is to plead the cause of some earthly right or property before the Judges of the land, or its Legislators, will, by deep study, prepare himself to give the most able and elaborate views of the subject; be it of a title or a tariff, a bond or a bank. It is a great occasion, and must task all the powers of the mind to do it justice. But "a little plain sense,"—is not this the thought of some? "a little plain sense, a little common-place thought, is good enough for religion!"

There are tasks for the religious teacher; and to name no other, that of disembarrassing religious experience from the many mistakes in which it is involved, is one that must carry the preacher far enough beyond the range of common-place truths, valuable as they may be; and one that is very necessary to the promotion of a just, and healthful religious sensibility. And this only amounts to saying, that there are new things to be said, new views to be given in religion; that, not plain and obvious things only are to be said, but that there is something to be told to many which they did not think of before. And what though the preacher *feel* his subject, and the people be impressed; yet after all, the impression, the feeling may have much in it that is wrong. The whole

subject of religious sensibility, its sources and the methods of its culture, may be very ill understood; and there is no little evidence that it is ill understood, from the fact, that most religious feeling is so artificial, so mechanical, so periodical, and fluctuating, and uncertain, instead of being habitual, and healthful, and strong. A man may feel very much, within a very narrow compass of thought. Who has not often observed it? But who that has observed it, would not think it desirable to carry him beyond this little mechanism, by which he continues from time to time, (if I may speak so) to grind out a certain amount of feeling,—to carry him beyond, I say, to those wide and generous views of religion, to that intelligent culture of his nature, from which religious feeling will spring naturally and freely, and flow abundantly, and in a full and living stream. There is all the difference here, and only of infinitely greater importance, that there is between the slavish machinist, governed by rules, and the intelligent artisan, discovering principles, constantly inventing, and improving, and ever going on to perfection.

But it is time that I should proceed from the defence to the more particular application of my proposition. And this is, that feeling in religion, to be deep and thorough, to be habitual, to be relied on to spring up with unvarying promptitude at every call of religion, *must be rational*, perfectly rational; rational in its nature, its methods of culture, its ends. You ask how you shall learn to feel on the subject of religion,—with spontaneous freedom, with unaffected delight, and with true-hearted earnestness—how you shall learn to feel in religion as you do in friendship,

and in the family relations—and I answer, *rationally.* And I say, moreover, that provided a man really and honestly desires and strives to feel, the reason why he fails, is, that there is something irrational in his views, irrational in his seeking, irrational in the whole method of his procedure. He has irrational views of the nature of religious feeling. He expects it to be some strange sensation, or something supernatural, or some hallucination, or something, he knows not what. Or he has wrong views of God. He does not see the glory and loveliness of his perfection. Or he has wrong ideas of the methods of obtaining religious feeling. He is, indolently, waiting for it, or irrationally expecting it to come upon him in some indescribable manner, or unreasonably looking for an influence from above, which God has never promised. For although he has promised help, he has not proffered in that help, any thing to be substituted for our own efforts: and our efforts are to be every way just as rational, as if he had promised nothing. Or, the seeker of religion has irrational views of the end. He does not distinctly see, that his perfection, his happiness, is the end. If he did, he would be drawn on to seek it, with a more willing and hearty earnestness. No, but he feels as if the demand for his heart in this matter, were a mere arbitrary requisition, as if it were the bare will of some superior Being, without any reason for it. He seeks religion, because he vaguely and blindly apprehends that it is something—that it is the prominent idea of thousands—something which he *must have.*

I say, that the process of obtaining a high and delightful religious sensibility, that sensibility which

makes prayer always fervent and meditation fruitful and satisfying, must be rational, and nothing but rational. And I do not say this, in any spirit of defiance towards that prevailing opinion which has fastened on this word, rational, the idea of coldness and indifference. I say it, because in sober truth and earnestness, I know of no other way to feel the deep sense of religion, but to feel it rationally. It is out of my power—is it *within* any man's power?—to conceive of any other way to awaken emotion, but to fix the mind on those objects that are to awaken it. If I would feel the sentiment of gratitude and love to my Creator, I can conceive of no way of doing so, but to think of his goodness, his perfection; to spread before my mind, all the images and evidences of his majesty, his perfection, his love. If I would feel the charms of virtue, I must contemplate her—I must *see* "virtue in her shape, how lovely." If I would love good men,—which is a part of religion—I must know them, and mingle with them; I must talk with them, or read of them, and spread the story of their generous and blessed deeds before me. And thus, also, and for the same reason, if I would love God I must not only contemplate him as has been already said, but I must be familiar with the contemplation of his being and perfection. Earth through all her fair and glorious scenes must speak to me, of him. The sacred page, with all its gracious words of teaching and promise, must speak to me of him. And I must listen with gladness, with a sense of my high privilege, and with joy must I commune, with all the teachings of God to me, as I would commune with the words of a friend. This is the rational process.

But this, my friends, is not to say, that "we hope we we shall some time or other, attain to the love of God," or that "we desire it," or that, "it is difficult," or that "we fear we never shall reach it"—it is not saying, and saying, this or that, in a sort of ideal, or idle speculation; but it is doing something. It is seeking to feel the power of religion, as we seek to feel the power of other things—of the arts, of philosophy, of science, of astronomy, or of music—attentively, sedulously, with a careful use of opportunities, with a heedful regard to circumstances. The rational method then, is the method of attention.

But in the next place, the rational method is the method of association; or, in other words, it is a method, which regards that great law of the mind, the law of association. It pays regard to places and times and seasons, and moods of mind. It is partly an indirect method. It is, putting ourselves in the way of obtaining a sense of religion.

The direct effort is to be valued for all that it is worth. And its value, indeed, is such that it is indispensable. Certainly, where the religious character is to be formed, after our arrival at the period of adult years, periodical and private meditation and prayer seem to be essential aids. There is much to learn, and much to overcome, and there should be definite seasons and direct efforts, for these purposes. But it would be irrational to make these seasons and efforts the only means. If we should attempt to form a friendship for a human being, by such a series of fixed and direct contemplations alone, it is easy to see that they would be very likely to be injurious, to create in our minds a set of repulsive or irksome associations with

the human being in question, however amiable and excellent he might be. It would require the effect of many indirect influences to blend with these, and give them their proper character. So in the cultivation of a devotional spirit, it is not safe to trust to prayers and meditations *alone*. Many wise and good men, in their writings, have recommended that the most special heed be given to those visitations of tender and solemn emotion, those touches of holy sensibility, those breathings of the Spirit of all grace, which steal into the heart unsolicited, and offer their heavenly aid, unsought. Let not him who would catch the sacred fervour of piety, venture to neglect these gracious intimations. Let him not neglect to put himself in the way of receiving them. Let him not willingly invade the holy Sabbath hours with business or pleasure, or forsake the assemblies where good men meditate and pray, or resist the touching signs of nature's beauty or decline, or turn away from the admonition of loneliness and silence, when they sink deep into the heart. Or, if he does turn away, and avoid, and resist all this, let him not say that he seeks or desires the good gift of the grace of God, the gift of light and love and holy joy.

Finally, the rational method is a method of consistency. Religious feeling to be itself rational, and to be rationally sought, must not be expected to spring up as the result of any thing else, than the whole character. You desire to feel the power of religion. Do not expect, do not desire, to feel it, but as an impression upon your whole mind and heart, the general tone and tenor of all your sentiments, and affections, the consenting together of your reflections, and actions,

and habits. If you feel it, as some peculiar thing, something singular in you, and technical in your very idea of it, as something apart from your ordinary self; if it is either a flame of the imagination, or a warmth of the affections, or a splendour of sentiment—one of them alone and not all of them together—it will certainly lead you astray: it will be but a wavering and treacherous light. It may appear to you very bright. It may lead you to think well of yourself; far better than you ought to think. But it will be only a glaring taper, instead of the true light of life.

An irrational fervour is often found to stand in direct contrast to the rest of the character; to general ignorance, to want of moral refinement and delicacy, and of daily virtue. There is not only a zeal without knowledge, but there is a zeal which seems to thrive exactly in proportion to the want of knowledge; that bursts out, from time to time, like a flame from thick smoke, instead of shining with any clear radiance and steady light. But it is the distinctive mark of rational feeling, that it rises gradually, and steadily gains strength; like the spreading of daylight upon the wakening earth. Hence, it rises slowly; and no one should be discouraged at small beginnings; and no one should expect or wish to rush into the full flow of religious sensibility, at once.

I repeat it; this sensibility, if rational, must be felt as the spirit of the whole character: and he would do well to tell us nothing of his joys, of whom nothing can be told, concerning his virtues, his self-denials, his general and growing improvement, the holy habits and heavenly graces of his character and life. Dost thou love good men, and pity bad men; is thy heart

touched with all that is generous and lovely around thee; is thine eye opened to all that is like God in his creatures and works? Then, and not till then, am I prepared to hear of thy love to God. Dost thou, indeed, love that great and kind Being? Dost thou, indeed, love that intrinsic, infinite, eternal, inexpressible beauty and glory of the divine perfection? Then, truly, art thou prepared rightly to love all who bear his image, and to pity and pray for all who bear it not; then, does thy social and religious sensibility flow on in one stream, full and entire, steady and constant—a living stream—a stream like that which floweth fresh, full, perennial, eternal, at the right hand of God!

My brethren! it *is* constant: so far at least as any thing human can bear that character; it *is* constant. He who will rationally cultivate the sense of religion, both directly, and indirectly, and as the consent and tendency of all his habits, may be just as certain of feeling it, as he is certain of loving his friend, his child, his chief interest. It is one of the irrational aspects of the *common* religious sensibility, that its possessors have usually spoken of it, as if it were totally uncertain whether, on a given occasion, they should feel it or not. They have gone to church, they have gone to their private devotions, with a feeling, as if it were to be decided, not by the habits of their own minds, but by some doubtful interposition of divine grace, whether they were to enjoy a sense of religion or not. But, my friends, nothing can be more certain to him who will rationally, heartily, and patiently cultivate the religious sensibilities of his soul, than that he shall, on every suitable occasion, feel them. It is, to him, no matter of distressing doubt and uncertainty.

He knows in whom he has believed. He knows in what he has confided. He knows, by sure experience, that as certainly as the themes of religion pass before him, they will, physical infirmity only excepted, arouse him to the most intense and delightful exercise of all his affections. He is sure—when the fulness of the blessing of the gospel of Christ is presented before him—he is like Paul, *sure* that he shall enter into it. Not that this is any boasting assurance of the devoted Christian. God forbid! He knows his weakness. But he knows, that by the very laws of the divine goodness and grace, if he will be faithful, no good thing shall be wanting to him.

Christian brethren! we hear much, in these days, about excitement. Why, every prayer—of a Christian at once perfectly rational, and perfectly devoted—every prayer is an excitement; and every religious service, every sermon, is an excitement as great as he can well bear; and every day's toil of virtue, and contemplation of piety, is a great and glorious excitement. Excitements! Is a man never to be moved by his religion but when some flood of emotion is sweeping through society—when agitation and disorder and confusion are on every side of him? Is it only when the tenor of quiet life, the pursuits of industry, the pleasures of relaxation, are all broken up, that he is to feel the power of religion? I do not say that this is any body's theory; but if this is the fact that results from any form of religious teaching, then I ask, for what end was the whole tenor of life—for what end were the pursuits of industry and the pleasures of society ordained? For what was the whole trial of life—so exquisitely moral, so powerfully spiritual—for

what was it appointed, if the seasons for obtaining religious impressions are so ordered by human interference, that they come only in idleness, disorder, and a derangement of the whole system of life? Excitements in religion! Are they to be things occasional, and separated by the distance of years? Is a man to be excited about religion, only in a certain month, or in the winter; and when that month, or that winter is past—yes, when all nature is bursting into life, and beauty, and songs of praise—is the religious feeling of the people to be declining into worse than wintry coldness and death? Is this, religion?—the religion whose path shineth brighter and brighter to the perfect day?

Let us have excitements in religion—but then let them be such as may be daily renewed, as never need to die away. Any excitement in society that can bear this character, I would heartily go along with. The Christian religion, I am sure, was designed powerfully to excite us; nothing on earth so much—nothing in heaven more. It was designed to arouse our whole nature, to enrapture our whole affection, to kindle in us a flame of devotion, to transport us with the hope and foretaste of heaven. But its excitements, if they be like those that appeared in the great teacher, are to be deep, sober, strong, and habitual. Such excitements may God ever grant us; not periodical but perpetual; not transient but enduring; not for times and seasons only, but for life; not for life only, but for eternity!

DISCOURSE X.

ON INDIFFERENCE TO RELIGION.

I. PETER 1. 17. AND IF YE CALL ON THE FATHER, WHO WITHOUT RESPECT OF PERSONS JUDGETH ACCORDING TO EVERY MAN'S WORK, PASS THE TIME OF YOUR SOJOURNING HERE IN FEAR.

I HAVE lately spoken to you of religious insensibility. I propose now to address myself to the case of religious indifference. It is a case which differs from the former, though the word may seem to import nearly the same thing; and it differs in this respect—that it is held by him to whom it appertains, to be capable of some defence. A want of feeling in religion is one thing, and it is a thing which a man often regrets; he never, perhaps, boasts of it. But a want of all interest about religion is another thing. It is a position which a man sometimes voluntarily assumes to himself, which is preliminary with him to the very grounds on which religious feeling is claimed, and which, therefore, he defends. He has not got so far as to allow the demand for feeling, to be brought home to his conscience; he has stopped short at the threshold of the whole subject; he denies that he is *bound* to take any particular interest in it; and is proud, it may be, of his independence, and exemption

from that great claim. Religious insensibility, then, admits and regrets its deficiency, or acknowledges, at least, that such regret would be proper; religious indifference does not admit so much; it defends itself.

We have not, therefore, as on the former subject, merely to point out causes, but we have now to combat reasons. We have to argue with those who maintain that they have *reasons*, for not taking any deep interest, or decided part, in religion.

What the nature of the reasons is, will appear in making another distinction. For there is a distinction to be made, as between insensibility and indifference, so also between indifference, and positive criminality. The plea of crime, or of vice in general, is, that passion is so strong and the temptation so great, that there is hardly power to resist: a plea, however, which was never made, without the consciousness of guilt, and the strong contradiction of the offender's own mind. But indifference says to the earnest and solemn preaching of the Gospel, "I am very well as I am now. I do not need religion; I do not *feel* the need of it; my *mind* acknowledges no such want. The world suffices me, life satisfies me, without religion; I am very well as I am now." This may be called perhaps, the practical apology of indifference; the apology which a man finds, or conceives that he finds, in the state of his mind. But, indifference has also a theoretical defence; it shelters itself, sometimes, under the apology of a limited creed. It says, to the earnest and solemn preacher of the Gospel, "I do not believe as you do; those moral dangers, those fearful doctrines, those dreadful warnings, which are preached to the people, I do not believe in: if I did, I should be bound,

I admit, to be aroused to anxiety and earnestness." The neglecters of religion are often found taking advantage of the controversies that prevail, and they say, "we do not know about these things; some hold to one thing, and some to another; even learned men differ; and we do not know, in fact, whether any thing is true."

These are the two classes of reasons for religious indifference, and I intend to consider them in order. But let us dwell a moment longer on the case itself; that in arguing on this subject, we may fight, not as one that beateth the air.

It is not indifference to certain circumstances in religion—to certain creeds, to certain forms, or to certain measures and enterprises in religion, against which I wish now to contend; but it is against that indifference which is vital. It is against indifference to the religious care and improvement of one's self. It is against that indifference which refuses to meditate, or read, or pray, or watch, or strive for the guidance, keeping, restraint and salvation of the soul—an indifference which holds these very terms—"keeping and salvation of the soul," to be out of its sphere entirely. It is against that indifference which has put on the almost impenetrable armour of settled habit and professed character; which is untouched by the most solemn appeals of the pulpit, because it says, "these are matters that I do not pretend to be zealous about;" or it is against the indifference, which, if moved for the moment, immediately relapses into the same old mood of mind, and says the same thing, in effect—all the week through, and all the year round. It is against the indifference, whether of philosophy that is too wise, or fashion that

is too frivolous, whether of wickedness that is too bold, or of worldliness that is too easy, to care for any of these things. Nay more; it is against that indifference, which is not real; which assumes a garb for the sphere it moves in; which, while there really are deep reflections and conscious wants, and thrilling solicitudes within, puts on a cold exterior towards religion, and consents to pass on the foolish jest and the slighting remark on this subject, because such is the tone of the society in which it moves. Not a little is there of this assumed indifference in the world.

And where the indifference is real, I do not say that it always appears in a very manifest, or fully developed and complete form. Moral states of mind seldom are very definite or complete. Religious indifference has many shades and degrees and disguises, and it defends itself by various, and sometimes almost unconscious, and even contradictory reasonings; so that I cannot on any account hold myself responsible for the supposition that it is always, one, obvious, and palpable thing. It is enough to say that there is, and is acknowledged to be, a large class of persons in the Christian world, in whom there are tendencies either to the neglect of all external religion, to forms, to public worship of every kind;—or what is much more serious—to the neglect of all personal interest, of all vital concern, with the subject. They do not consider this as a matter with which they have any thing to do. Business belongs to them, or professional labours belong to them; and to think about these things, to inquire, to read, to take an interest about things of a worldly nature,—all this is, with them, a part of the recognised object, and plan, and pursuit of life. But

religion has no such place in their thoughts—not even in their Sabbath thoughts. It is not an object to them any time. It is not an interest with them, ever. They care for none of these things.

The pertinency of my text to this case, I may now observe, and to the course of remark which I contemplate, lies in this; that the demand for a very serious and even anxious concern in religion, is there supported on the ground of a very limited creed. "If ye call on the Father who without respect of persons judgeth every man's work; pass the time of your sojourning here in fear." My argument, with religious indifference, then, from the spirit of my text, is, to the following effect: that which is certainly true, in life and in the mind—that which almost every man believes to be true in the creed, or in the Bible—and in fine, that which the sceptic denies to be true,—each and all of these, are considerations and grounds for the deepest concern about religion.

Our text says, and it says to all, without exception, "live in the present world in fear;" i. e. not in slavish dread, of course, but in a just fear, in a pious reverence towards God, and faithful guardianship over the conscience. And it says this concerning the whole of life; "pass the time of your sojourning here" in this wisdom and piety. And then, as an argument for thus living, it lays down these simple positions—undeniable by all but unbelievers, and generally admitted even by them—"if ye call on the Father who without respect of persons, judgeth every man's work," live thus.

Let us then look at this indifference in its strong hold of negations—its pleas, that it does *not* believe so much as others, or that it does *not* need religion.

Let us see, if what every man must admit, as a matter of experience, and what almost every man does admit as a matter of faith; nay, and if what any man may please to *deny* as a matter of faith, does not afford an argument for the utmost religious consideration, solicitude, and sensibility.

My first concern is, with what every man must admit as a matter of experience and of fact. Let us then direct our attention to life and to the mind—the scene of events and the being who experiences them—and let us direct our attention to them, first, in connection with each other.

Whenever a man looks around him, there are certain things which he must acknowledge. He is a living man, and there is a scene of life, there are events and ordinances of life for him to pass through—events and ordinances of life which he must pass through, let his character be what it may. It is striking indeed, to think that every mind, however reckless and trifling, must fall upon all the trials, the allotments, the fates of this mortal and momentous existence. The boast of health is no shield against disease; nor the frivolity of pleasure, against sadness and sorrow. Avarice must come to the hour of utter destitution: and pride to the hour of utter prostration. How powerful a call to religion, then, is life itself! How powerfully does it forbid all indifference! Life, I repeat, with all that makes it up; with all its great and solemn ordinations of toil, and endurance, and vicissitude, and sickness, and affliction; with all its periods—of glowing youth, and sober manhood, and thoughtful age; life, with its trembling ties of friendship, its holy rites of marriage, its sympathies of kindred, and its homes of affection; with its attend

ance on sickness and languishment, and its last sad offices to the beings of its love and companionship—life, I repeat, the body's frailty and decay, the soul's conflict, the mind's discipline, the heart's solemn monitress—Oh! who can look with indifference to the Ordainer of such a lot? Who can live, and die, in perfect unconcern with regard to the Being, who has made him to live, and die? I confess that to my own mind, it seems inevitable that I should be moved in some way, yes, religiously moved, by this experience of life. If I were impious I should rail at it; if I were devout, I should humbly submit to its discipline; but not to feel at all!—I must be a stock, or a stone! Life—by every joy, by every sorrow of it!—life is no neutral scene; and how can—how *can* he who experiences it, be neutral?

Surely, I take the lowest ground of supposition; and yet I demand—since I *cannot* demand religious execration and wrath—I demand the loftiest height of piety. A living man—take that bare supposition, which is yet something beyond that of mere existence—a *living* man, I repeat, should be a religious man. I said not, a living animal; but a man,—that takes not, and cannot take life as a beast does; that sees and must see in it, something of deeper import;—and yet of an import which nothing but religion can fully comprehend and fathom. For religion is at once the only proper end of life, and its only sufficient and satisfactory interpreter. And I do aver, both for the immediate and the ultimate reason, that he who comes to reflect deeply on what he is, and what is around him, upon the world without, and the world within him, cannot get along with any satisfaction or comfort unless he

takes the guidance of religion. I have said that he must be religious in some way, but I further insist that to get along with any satisfaction, he must be religious in the right way. I do say, and fearlessly say, that he who should reflect thoroughly and deeply on life, could no more think of living without God in the world than he could think of living without the bounty of nature; that prayer would be as necessary to him as food; and the faith of his soul, as indispensable as the sight of his eyes.

I know the strength of this language, and what may be alleged against it. I know that there are men of general integrity and worth, who, with a sort of amiable ease or indolence of spirit, say, that "they are well enough as they are." I think, too, that I understand the meaning of this language, and I distinctly see, as I apprehend, that it does not go to the depth—no, nor any where near to the depth, of their nature and their wants. They are "well enough," in a worldly sort—well enough, because they are comfortable, and prosperous. But will all this meet the great, the general, and the urgent want of the human heart? Does the heart never ask any thing that riches cannot give? Does it never sigh for a peace that the world cannot give? I know not what the worldly heart may answer; but this I know, that some of the most bitter complainers, that ever poured out the language of satire and scorn and disgust upon this world, are precisely the most worldly beings in it. No, the world does not satisfy the worldly; and they know it. How is it possible that it should do so, if the mind of a worldly man be still a mind;—if there be any thing in him that can be called a mind!

Why, even the senses range far beyond this world. Fix thine eye upon a star, in the infinite distance and depth of heaven. What beam is that which visiteth thee from afar? If I were to pause now for the brief space of only eight minutes, a ray from the sun would, in that brief interval, have traversed almost an hundred millions of miles, to reach us! What beam, then, is that which visiteth thee from far, far beyond the precincts of solar day? Through the slow revolutions of years—I speak the astronomical fact;—for aught thou knowest, before thou wast created—I speak the astronomical doubt;—for aught thou knowest, before the world was created, that ray of light left its native seats, and through distances awful, and inconceivable, through the silent lapse and the slow revolution of years unknown, that ray of light has been travelling onward, and onward, till it has fallen on thy poor weak sense. Now, follow it back, on the line of its immeasurable progress, to its original sphere, its home which it hath left to teach thee—and does thy mind stop there? No: nor there, nor any where does it stop, but beyond and beyond, to infinity, to eternity, it wanders. And can that mind say, that it is "well enough" in a little earthly comfort and a few worldly possessions? Can the soul, that spans the universe, and measures ages, be content with a grain of sand upon this shore of time? No. Hold thou the measureless ocean in the hollow of thy hand; and then, mayest thou curb the swellings of thought, passion, and desire, to that narrow compass. Garner up the treasures of infinite worlds in thy coffer; and then mayest thou lock up in that coffer, the affections that are expanding to the grasp of infinity. No, mistaken soul! thine eye spans the

arch of heaven—thy soaring thought riseth to the eternal stars; thine aim must be broad and boundless as those pathways of heaven. As surely as thou livest, thou must live religiously, virtuously, wisely. Life is an argument for piety. Sense is a guide to faith. Time should bear our thoughts, as it is bearing our souls, to eternity!

But there are other witnesses to be summoned in this argument, besides events, and their unavoidable impression. There are distinct wants in the mind. Amidst the cares and conflicts of this life, there are certain ultimate objects, in which all men are interested. One of these objects is happiness. I say, then—I may say to every man, however irreligious—thou wouldst be happy.

Thou wouldst be happy. When thou art happiest,—still something is wanting—and thou wouldst be happier. When thy thought is brightest, a shade like the shadow of a cloud upon the fairest landscape, cometh over thee, and thou wouldst, thy thought were brighter. When thy possessions are most abundant, there is yet a want in thy mind; and thou would have a more satisfying fulness within. Is there any thing but what is all-perfect, and infinite, and immortal, that can satisfy thee? But the all-perfect and the infinite, and the immortal, belong to the province of religion; and if thou wouldst find them, thou must find them, in her glorious sphere.

But again I say; thou wouldst he happy. Thou wouldst be happy—ay, thou wouldst, indeed, be so, when thou art *not* happy; for what is so intolerable as misery? Thou wouldst be happy when thou art sick; when thou art sorrowful; when thou art bereaved.

When thou art cast down, and almost crushed by some of the thousand, nameless, burthens of life, thou wouldst be happy. And dost thou know, canst thou conceive of any thing, that can make thee happy in these circumstances, but religion?

But again, in regard to this matter of happiness, I may say to every one,—something troubles you, at one time or another,—something is the matter with you. What is it? What aileth thee, O never satisfied man! What is it? What is it, that takes from the joy of life, when at the fullest; or disturbs the clear and overflowing fountain, or embitters its waters? What is it? You tell me of events, of annoyances, of a troublesome world, of the vexations of life. Do you not know, that life and the world, are the reflection of yourself—the image without, of the reality within? What is it, then? Ah! it is evermore, some unholy passion—pride or envy, or sensual excess, or the workings of a selfish, ungenerous, ungrateful mind. A calm and self-governed temper, a benevolent gladness of spirit, the cheerfulness of a good conscience, the gentle affections of piety, would make every fountain of earthly good, a fountain of real peace and happiness. Does any man deny this? Does the most confirmed sceptic, or the boldest scorner, deny it? Religion, then, above all other things is commended to the desire of happiness. It comes near, it is adjunct, to that great desire. It belongs to it;—as light to the eye that would see; as food to the hunger that would be satisfied. Deep, then, impatient, unquenchable as that desire is, strongly, unceasingly, eternally as it beats, like the pulse of existence, in the human heart, so deeply, so strongly, so unceasingly, should the human heart be interested

about that which alone can give it happiness: interested, not merely as in something future and far off, but as in something of present, pressing, instant concern. If the heart knew its own welfare it would be so interested. And the very soul of youth would not burn with a love of unholy pleasure, so intense, but it would be quenched in the holy tears of that supplication, "Oh! satisfy me early with thy mercy, that I may be glad and rejoice in thee all my days."

Once more and with regard to the wants of the mind, and the ultimate objects of life: if you are a reasonable being, you would improve. If you were a brute, you might neither know nor care any thing for this. But if you are a reasonable being you must desire to improve. You cannot stop at the point you have now reached, and be satisfied. You would, you must go onward; and you never will come to the point—it is not in your nature ever to come to the point—from which you would not go onward! A thousand ages of improvement would find you still asking to go onward. Can you then be indifferent to that religion whose sphere is eternity?

Indeed, my brethren, how much religion might do for us—not alas! how much it does, but how much it might do for us, in this matter of improvement—how much not only to subdue the passions and control the conduct, but to soften the heart, and the very manners; how much to unfold the genius, to develop the powers of the mind; how much to cheer and quicken the soul, to give it courage, to inspire it with a pure and noble ambition to rise to true greatness:—how much of all this, religion might do, in the work of moral culture, and of early education, I fear we but little con-

sider, and but poorly comprehend. And yet a very plain argument might show it. If we would train an artist to excellence we place before him perfect models. If we would raise any one to the loftiest virtue, we direct him constantly to fill his mind with the noble image, the divine idea of it. Prayer carries us, at once, to the infinite original and image of all goodness. Piety, meekness, and forgiveness, bear us to the company of Jesus. In heartily communing with such objects as religion places before us, with the love of God, with the simple gospel of Christ, with his sacred precepts, with his divine example, it is impossible but that every thing good or godlike in us, should improve. And the man who says that he desires to improve, and yet is indifferent to such a religion, presents a solecism in morals, as great as he would do, who, professing the desire to be rich, should turn away from the wealthiest mine, or the most gainful traffic.

And does a mind that turns away from this great opportunity, say that it is well enough as it is? Would it satisfy you, if your child, indolently neglecting his studies, should say that he is well enough as he is? And will the great Giver of life, and law-giver of the heart, be satisfied with such an answer from you? Is it what he reasonably expects from such a nature as he has given you? Not advancing, not improving, not using any of those principles of improvement which are essentially the principles of religion; and yet well enough? A stock or a stone, were it endowed with consciousness, might say that! An animal, whose distinctive nature it is, never to improve, might say that! But for a man to say that—for a man—ne-

glecting the Sabbath, neglecting his Bible, neglecting prayer—to say that he is well enough in that condition—what better is it than the fancied well-being of insanity? Nay, better for a man, than that fancied well-being, provided he clings to the delusion—better were it for him if he had never been born!

I have now considered what may be called the practical apology for religious indifference, and must defer the consideration of the theoretical defence, till our next meditation. The practical apology, I have said, is one which a man finds in the state of his own mind, and which is briefly expressed in the declaration, that he does not want any thing of religion; that he is well enough without it.

To me, I must confess, this state of mind is one of the greatest of mysteries. We hear much of the mysteries of religion, and the negligent and indifferent are the very persons, perhaps, who complain most of mysteries, and even make of them an apology for their indifference. But I confess that they themselves present in their own persons, anomalies and mysteries, that go farther than all others, to stagger and confound not only faith, but reason itself. It is the most inconceivable thing in human experience, that any man with the feelings and reflections of a man, should be able to take and hold a position of absolute indifference, with regard to a subject so all-embracing and intimately connected with him, as religion. If I did not know the fact to be so; if it were not a matter of confession and even of boast with some, I should scarcely be able to believe it. No testimony, I am ready to say—nothing but confession, could convince me of it. For I do not know what the life of

a mind is, that can be thus estranged from religion. Occupying a point of space amidst infinite systems of beauty and harmony—a breathing hour of time, between the eternity past, and the eternity to come; seeing clear manifestations of boundless power and wisdom on every side in the whole creation, and yet ignorant of ten thousand mysteries, that fill that creation from its lowest depth to its topmost height; a mind seeing this, and feeling this, and tried, too, with the ten thousand events of life—ay, and suffering, often-times sinking, and yet at other times soaring and aspiring to things infinite and immortal;—that mind, I say—what is it?—What is it made of, and what is it made for, if it does not sometimes stretch out the hand of entreaty, for a guidance and support, for a voice of teaching and a solution of mysteries, beyond this world? Let it be so, that right, and rectitude, and obligation, and duty were all out of the question: yet where is curiosity? Where is the questioning that belongs to a thoughtful and intelligent creature, amidst a scene like this? It is a mystery, I will not say, of iniquity; but it is a mystery of dulness, surpassing all comprehension. O! men of this world, whosoever ye are!—O! men who are altogether of this world!—talk not to us of our mysteries, till ye have cleared up your own mysteries. A mind, insensible to all the highest interests of a mind—a mind, bereft of all the attributes of a thinking, inquiring, suffering, unsatisfied being—what is it, I ask again? Is it matter, or spirit?—Is it an earthly creature? No; for its thoughts stretch beyond the earth. Is it a heavenly being? No, for it cares not for heaven. What is it

then, and where is its place? Where in the universe of things is its place?

Ah! how surely is that *out* of its place, for which no position can be found, in the eye of reason, or of common sense, or even of imagination! Let him who has wandered—whether in the ways of gain, or of philosophy, or of fashion, to the verge of that shadowy region, that shore of spectral illusions, that world of spiritual death and mental chaos, where nothing is right, nor reasonable, nor sure, nor safe—let him start back, as from the gulf of annihilation, and return to the way of life. Let him turn back to the solid ground of faith, of reason, of wisdom. Let him enter upon the path that is bright with truth and virtue—the path that shineth brighter and brighter to the perfect day.

DISCOURSE XI.

ON INDIFFERENCE TO RELIGION.

I. PETER 1. 17. AND IF YE CALL ON THE FATHER, WHO WITHOUT RESPECT OF PERSONS JUDGETH ACCORDING TO EVERY MAN'S WORK, PASS THE TIME OF YOUR SOJOURNING HERE IN FEAR.

I HAVE spoken in my last discourse from these words of the practical apology for religious indifference; the apology, that is to say, which a man finds in his own heart; and which he expresses when he says, that "he does not need religion—that he is very well as he is now." I have appealed to life, to the love of happiness, to the desire for improvement—I have appealed to the mind, nay, and the senses, to say whether this can be so: and they have all answered and truly answered, as I think, that this grand practical assumption of religious indifference is utterly mistaken, untrue, unfounded in the nature of things, and of the mind.

I shall now proceed to consider the theoretical defence of religious indifference; the apology, that is to say, of a limited creed. Let us see then whether the most limited creed, still is not ample and solemn enough to overshadow with awe, the most negligent mind that takes shelter under it.

If, says the apostle, "ye call on the Father." Here is recognised the first article of almost universal belief; that there is a God! It is, indeed, the first arti-

cle of every creed, the foundation principle of every religion; it is as we call it, the first truth and the plainest truth; and we utter it in common words and tones such as we give to all other truth, till the danger is, that all its sublimity and mysteriousness will be lost in its certainty, and familiarity, and constant repetition. But what a truth is it, and what mind that thinks of it, can be indifferent. That there is a God, and with such attributes—eternal, but existing in time; infinite, but existing in space, all around us; all-creating, himself uncreated; all-sustaining, himself independent; all-seeing, himself invisible; all-comprehending, himself incomprehensible—whose mind, that thinks of it, is not lost, is not overwhelmed in this truth? To acknowledge this, and not to be religious, is an utter and almost inconceivable contradiction of ideas. It is a moral absurdity, which no language can express. It is like saying there is light, and not seeing it—there is danger, and not fearing it—there is sublimity, and not reverencing; there is glory, and not admiring; there is beauty, or loveliness, and not loving it. It is more; for it is saying that there is a Being, to whom all these ideas belong, without measure or end, and not entertaining any correspondent emotion.

There is no thought which we can admit to our minds, concerning God, but it is a solemn thought. If he dwelt at an infinite distance from us; if his presence never came near to us; if he never had any concern with us; if the world had formed itself and us, by certain self-producing powers of its own; if we and our humble sphere were too insignificant to be noticed; still that atheism in the thoughts, leaves to us the

conception of a Being, though distant, yet so wonderful, that the bare idea of him must strike us with awe, that the bare idea of him might be enough to arrest the most careless mind, and to fix it for ever in the profoundest admiration. But, suppose that the doctrine concerning that great Being, came nearer to us—suppose that God were the actual Maker of this world and our Maker, but had left all to itself, as some seem to imagine, and took no further account of the work of his hands: yet how much does even that supposition leave us to awaken a religious devoutness? Even then we should have it to consider that we dwell where God has been! that we dwell amidst the tokens of a mighty presence passed away! that every hill and mountain lifted up before us the dread monuments of departed omnipotence! What a thought might that be, to strike the mind with the profoundest awe! He who should wander amidst some silent city of the mighty dead, amidst broken columns, and falling temples, and feel no serious nor sublime emotion, would not be guilty of such unpardonable inconsistency or dulness, as the moral being who acknowledges in any sense, that there is a God, and feels no religious awe.

But how solemn is the truth,—and what words shall declare it,—that this awful and glorious Being, is not in the infinite height, nor in the unfathomable depth only, nor in the immeasurable distance where thought and imagination have never wandered—but that God is here also!—*here* in all the majesty and glory, that fill the heavens with his splendours! "Oh! God!" should we not exclaim if we felt this—"God, who art present with us! help our unbelief and indifference." Indifference! my brethren,—and the admission that

there is a God!—what power of imagination can make such things to coexist—to dwell together, in the same world, in the same soul! And yet, alas! they are found to meet in the experience of thousands.

But I pass to another part of what may be considered as the general belief. "If ye call upon the Father" —this implies the first part—"who without respect of persons, judgeth every man's work." Here is recognised the universal obligation of duty, and the certainty of retribution.

Now duty,—to consider this in the first place—duty is, in its very nature, something that admits of no neutrality, and consequently, of no indifference. To whatever it applies, it imparts a peculiar character: it binds the most indifferent things with a bond, strong as the almighty will. But duty is, at the same time, a principle of boundless application. There is not a thought, nor a word, nor a deed, but duty has a relation to it. There is no place of our abode but duty is there with its claims. No view is there which we can take of it, but is of very deep import. Its sanction is an infinite authority; its residence is in the immortal part; its issues go forth to eternity. It is the dignity, and happiness, and perfection, of our nature. It is the end of our being. If it is failed of,—what misery is the consequence! And yet it is as easy to fail of it, as to take any of a thousand devious paths, rather than the only one that is right.

There is no class of our duties that are so readily acknowledged as those which are relative: those which we owe to one another. These are, indeed, first principles of the doctrine of Christ. But they are held also to be the first principles of reason. They are the

faith and boast of unbelievers! To be just, generous, and kind; to have a benevolent regard to the best welfare of others; to be honest, disinterested and useful; these are obligations which it would be thought unnatural, unpardonable, to deny. To admit and practise them, is thought to be the least that we can do. And yet, after all, how momentous an affair is it, rightly to discharge the very least of these universally acknowledged duties! How rare is it, to see a perfect, or even a very high exemplification, of the faithful and friendly offices that men owe to one another! How difficult is it, to preserve our conduct from offence, our lips from guile, our hearts from unworthy feelings! How strait is the path even of honesty, of friendship, of natural affection! Who does not deviate? Who does not require a strict guard? The best, the kindest, the most faithful err, and have occasion to mourn over their folly, their carelessness, or their passion.

And then, there are others for whom *society* mourns. How do all the relations of life bleed under one cruel infliction! How easy is it to touch some point in the delicate system of social connections, that shall send contagion and suffering through the whole! How prevalent is evil! How prolific, how diffusive is vice!

Or, to take a higher view of these relative duties; if we are bound to regard each other's welfare, then, surely, that which is the highest and the most permanent—the future, the eternal. And this view presents society before us, as one vast association, whose great concern is, to form its members to religious virtue, to piety, to the love of God, to the spirit of heaven. It teaches us that our greatest duty is to the soul; our most momentous influence is on the character. Now

it need not be said what fidelity, what circumspection, what care, what perfection of social life, ought to flow, from the simple acknowledgment of these most simple and unquestionable principles and duties.

But our relation to futurity is not that merely of an influence exerted on others, but it is the more solemn relation of an influence, because it is a deeper influence, exerted on ourselves. All is not to end here, indeed; but we believe moreover, that what is to go onward is *retribution;* that while the good have every thing to hope, the bad have every thing to fear; that every man has enough to hope or to fear, to occupy many deep and weighty thoughts. We believe that our actions when committed, are not for ever done with; that the record of life as it passes, is sealed up for a future inspection; that these days of our mortal existence, are to be subjected not merely to that partial review of conscience with which we sometimes close them, but to the tribunal of that great Being who gave to conscience all its power. We expect the day when we shall stand before the judgment-seat; when the book,—ah! how firmly closed against all inspection now!—when the book of our experience will be opened, and we shall be judged out of it. How serious is that prospect! Who can look to that future scene with indifference? Who, while the time of his sojourning here is hastening away, will not pass it in wisdom, and sobriety, and godly fear? Oh! there is enough in the bare, the indefinite possibilities of a future account, to fill us with apprehension. Our experience tells us, that the retribution which awaits the sinful soul, cannot be a slight matter; it cannot be a slight matter now: it cannot now be pushed aside by the hand of indiffer-

ence. But what shall be that great consummation of the work of conscience, its last infliction, its gnawing worm and unquenchable fire, futurity,—the unknown, the awful futurity alone, can reveal; but let us believe, that one word of revelation from that future world, would break up our indifference for ever.

But our belief—i. e. the common belief—goes still farther. Each of us probably believes, not only that he has a rational nature, and not only, that this is bound by the obligation of duty and to the certainty of retribution; but that this soul is immortal; that there is within him an emanation from the Divinity—which has a being commensurate with that of the Divinity itself—which will live while God exists. What an amazing connection is this, with the future! What thoughts does it suggest for each one of us to meditate upon! "This soul within me"—may you say—"so familiar, so endeared to me by its earthly experience —*my* soul—*myself*, am to live for ever, and ever! Ages will crowd on ages, and yet I shall live. Unbounded systems will revolve—the eternal fires that enlighten them may grow old and die away, and revive again, and kindle their light anew,—and yet the morning of my endless being will hardly have broken around me! Time shall be no longer; and duration shall pass all thought and measurement—yet when ten thousand boundless revolutions of ages are accomplished, and thousands and millions more are added to them, I shall live, and shall yet look forward to eternity! O poor and vanishing life! O ye toys of a summer's day, wealth, and fame, and pleasure!—where are ye now?" And yet, brethren, I have seen a man who could be serious in gathering up this perishing dust; yes, I have

seen him serious; and anxious with the fear of losses: but he thought it too much to be serious in religion; too much to be anxious for his immortal being! Yes, I have see him meditate—I have seen him tremble—I have seen him labouring—labouring on, through life, with many and wearisome cares; but he cannot meditate, he cannot tremble, he cannot labour for his soul! His indifference to what is spiritual and immortal, can be equalled, I was about to say, by nothing: and yet there is one thing to equal it; and that is—his eagerness for every passing phantom of this perishing world. His indifference, and all his indifference centres in the only point where his essential interest lies, where his essential being is treasured up—in his soul!—and he never saw the day—it is no fiction; it is reality, that I utter—he never saw the day, when he could think so much of his soul, when he could labour so much for it, as he can for the most trifling addition to his worldly gains!

But to escape the charge of an inconsistency so palpable, as that which is implied in the acknowledgment of any religious truth, and a total religious indifference, there may be some who are prepared to go farther than we have yet supposed. There may be some who will say, "we believe nothing in regard to religion, and therefore we are bound to feel nothing, and to care nothing, about it."

I am not sure but I have now presented a case, which makes indifference more shocking and monstrous than any other that can be supposed. Let me state it to you, in terms. It is common, and it is thought, decorous, to repeat a creed, in a very deliberate and serious manner. He who says, "I believe in God, I

believe in Jesus Christ, I believe in the life everlasting," is expected to do it solemnly. But let us listen to the no-creed of the confirmed sceptic. Let a man take his stand beyond the boundaries of all religious truth; beyond the boundaries of light, where all is darkness before and around him; let him stand there, dimly seen, a cursing spirit, on the borders, to his view, of eternal night; let him lift up his hand to those heavens, shining with ten thousand harmonious systems of worlds—and amidst the ten thousand voices of nature let him say, "I believe, in nothing—but in darkness, and desolation, and death;—I believe in no God; I believe in no Saviour; I believe in no hope hereafter: death is an eternal sleep; the Bible is a fiction; the adoration of a God, is but the dream of bigots and enthusiasts!"—let him say this!—but can he say it without trembling—can he say it without pain, without regret, without one struggle to hold on, to the last parting hope of existence? If he can, yet let him know that no one can *hear* him without trembling; and so awful a spectacle would it be, if a man should thus stand before us, that it would not be strange to us, if the voices of nature, if the mutterings of distant thunder should answer back, and speak in the name of that awful and omnipresent One, whose being he denies.

But there may be some men, nay, there are men in this very community, reckless enough in their fearful consistency, and strong enough in their insane courage, to aver that they can say all this without horror or regret. If so, let us see what sort of men they are that can make this averment: let us make a discrimination here, for at this point it becomes necessary. There are, then, two kinds of unbelievers; the intellectual and refined, and the sensual and brutish unbeliever.

The intellectual and refined unbeliever is one, who has usually become such, from some peculiarity of mind, or misfortune of education, from some misapprehensions of revealed religion, or mystycism about nature, which prevent him, as I think, from feeling the force of plain evidence. The difficulty lies in his mind; and it is a difficulty which he most sincerely regrets. He wishes he could believe. Perhaps he does believe, almost without knowing it. Perhaps he does believe more than he imagines. Perhaps he embraces almost every important truth of the Gospel, while he thinks himself obliged, by the laws of evidence, to reject its supernatural origin. But the point which I am concerned, at present to insist upon, is this; that the intellectual and refined unbeliever always regrets his unbelief. He feels, beyond expression, the wants of an intellectual nature, and he sighs with every aspiration of a burdened soul—in silence and sadness and bitterness of heart—he sighs for relief. Now this man is not at ease with regard to religion. Indifference to the subject is the last thing of which to accuse him. He is as far from indifference perhaps, as the most faithful and devoted Christian. And I would beseech such an one, if I addressed any such, never to suffer himself carelessly to consider *his* state of mind, as an apology for religious negligence. His, is the last state of mind that can fairly furnish such an apology. He is bound by every rational consideration to be an anxious seeker of the truth, and of the true way. He is not, it is true, in a condition, most favourable to improvement; but he is in a condition that utterly and for ever, forbids all indifference.

It is therefore the sensual unbeliever only that can

be indifferent, or that can pretend to have any reason for being so. And here it may seem, that we are stopped and foreclosed altogether, from proceeding any farther, with argument or expostulation. But if it be so, let us stand a moment, and see if we can help standing aghast, at the object that is presented before us. It is a being; it is a moral being—*we* know it, if he does not—his every effort to defend himself, proves that he is moral; it is a moral being; it is a man. Look at him. He is a moral being and a man, and he declares—this is the supposition—God forbid that it should often be reality, but this is the supposition—he declares that he does not believe *any* thing religious to be true; that he does not wish it to be true; that he is persuaded that it is not true; and that he cares nothing about it. He declares that he *has* no deep, intellectual wants, of which other men talk; that he has no glorious aspirations which nothing but heaven can meet; that he has no high and generous affections which nothing but virtue can satisfy; that all this about virtue and improvement, about hope and heaven, is a mistake, and a fancy, and a dream. He declares finally, that the senses are to him every thing; that he believes, (to use the words of an unsexed female lecturer in some of our theatres)—that he believes in what he *sees*, and that is all he does believe in;—presumptuous and preposterous nonsense! as if thoughts in the mind, ay, and wants in the mind, were not things as really existing, as the objects of vision:—and our sceptic declares, moreover, that he seeks for nothing, hopes for nothing, but the indulgences of sense, and that to wallow in sensual pleasures, all his life, and then die for ever, is all that he wants!

Let no one start at this representation, and say that it is all hypothesis, and that nobody ever felt thus; for *if* it be hypothesis—*if* no man ever felt this, then there is not a being in the world that can protect his religious indifference, under even the flimsiest garb of reason. There is no defence for religious indifference, unless it be found in that utter, appalling, revolting, self-damning scepticism. But suppose that scepticism to exist; that defence to be set up; that case represented, to be reality; then, I say, in fine, what a reality is it for a man to sit down with, in indifference! Gracious heavens! for a man to declare himself a brute, and to make that a reason for being unconcerned; to take refuge from the calls of religion among the herd of animals; to deny himself the very attributes of humanity, that he, a human being, may be at ease in his sins, his irreligion, and spiritual lethargy—why, what is it but to make an argument that carries with it, its own strongest refutation? Truly such an argument for indifference ought to break it up for ever. The horror of having used it,—though every other resort had failed —the very horror of having used it, like the last warning of death in the ear, should startle the self-indulgent sleeper from his repose, and never suffer him again to sink towards that fatal security!

But, my brethren—to add one word more, and more accordant with the situation of an assembly of professed believers—if the argument of scepticism is so fearful, surely the indifference of faith, is, if possible, yet more so.

Not life with all its teachings, not the love of happiness, not even the belief in a God, in duty, in retribution, in an immortal soul—no, nor the denial of all

these things, is so fearful, as it is, amidst the acknowledgment of such truths, to be unconcerned—to sleep amidst the calls of God and nature, of life and death, of time and eternity! Even scepticism we have said has cause to be distressed,—to be overwhelmed with its gloomy doubts. But indifference, *with faith*, is a step beyond all—more rash, if possible, more heaven-defying than any other. There is a hope for it, indeed, which there is not for utter scepticism, but it is a hope amidst perils and threatenings. There is a salvation for it, which utter unbelief rejects; but it must be salvation, if possible, from more aggravated sins. Yes, the light of truth is around this man, and the warning depths are beneath, but he sins on, and sleeps on—sleeps on, upon the very brink of destruction! What shall save him! What power shall interpose for his rescue? No hand of miracle will be stretched out to pluck him from that edge of peril and perdition. No power to save, stirs within him, while he thus sleeps in security. What then *shall* save him? Consider it, I beseech you, if you be a negligent hearer; consider it, before it is too late. Surely indifference never saved any man: it has destroyed millions. Surely, every thing must be wrong in him, whom nothing will arouse, neither to righteousness, nor to the consciousness of wanting it, nor to the fear of consequences. The last hold upon such a man, *while* such, is lost; and futurity must awaken *him* to condemnation, whom the present cannot awaken to repentance, to prayer, and to the care of his soul.

But let me not, with such terms, close this meditation. Assailing religious indifference, in its strong holds, as I have to-day, I have felt, and too naturally felt

perhaps, that my words were to fall, not on the tenderness of the human heart, but, as it were, on the scales of leviathan. But that tenderness—where is it not? —in what assembly is it not? My friends, I know—of many of you at least—I know, that ye are not indifferent. Life *is* to you, that moving scene, which it is to every thoughtful and feeling mind. The Bible *is* to you, the book of your faith and trust. Blessed trust! touching experience! and they are yours. No, ye are not indifferent. But then I beseech you, act not as if ye were so. Think it not enough to admit, to-day, that you ought to be interested in this great subject. Show that you *are* so, to-morrow, and every day. *Let it appear*, I entreat you, that ye are men, who believe in your Bibles. Let your *life* give testimony to the GREAT PRINCIPLE which should guide you. In all things show your fidelity to it. In business, be conscientious; in pleasure temperate; in suffering patient; in prosperity, thankful; in *all things, religious.* If ye call on the Father; if here, in the holy sanctuary, and if in the silence of your own dwellings, ye call on the Father, who without respect of persons, judgeth according to every man's work, pass the time of your sojourning here, in fear, in wisdom, in acts of piety, in works of righteousness.

DISCOURSE XII.

THE LAW OF RETRIBUTION.

GALATIANS 6. 7. BE NOT DECEIVED; GOD IS NOT MOCKED: FOR WHATSOEVER A MAN SOWETH, THAT SHALL HE ALSO REAP.

I UNDERSTAND these words, my brethren, as laying down in some respects a stricter law of retribution, than is yet received even by those who are considered as its strictest interpreters. There is much dispute about this law at the present day; and there are many who are jealous, and very properly jealous, of every encroachment upon its salutary principles. But even those who profess to hold the strictest faith on this subject, and who, in my judgment, do hold a faith concerning what they call the infinity of man's ill-desert, that is warranted neither by reason nor scripture,—even they, nevertheless, do often present views of conversion and of God's mercy, and of the actual scene of retribution, which, in my apprehension detract from the wholesome severity of the rule by which we are to be judged. Their views may be strong enough, too strong; and yet not strict enough, nor impressive enough. Tell a man that he deserves to suffer infinitely, and I am not sure, that it will, by any means come so near his conscience, as to tell him that he

deserves to endure some small, but specific evil. Tell him that he deserves an infinity of suffering, and he may blindly assent to it; it is a vast and vague something that presses upon his conscience, and has no edge nor point: but, put a sword into the hand of conscience, and how might this easy assenter to the justice of infinite torments, grow astonished and angry, if you were to tell him that he deserved to suffer but the amputation of a single finger! Or, tell the sinner that he shall suffer for his offences a thousand ages hence, and though it may be true, and will be true, if he goes on offending till that period, yet it will not come home to his heart with half so vivid an impression, or half so effectual a restraint, as to make him foresee the pain, the remorse, and shame, that he will suffer the very next hour. Tell him, in fine, as it is common to do—tell him of retribution in the gross, and however strong the language, he may listen to it with apathy; he often does so; but if you could show him what sin is doing within him, at every moment; how every successive offence lays on, another and another shade upon the brightness of the soul; how every transgression, as if it held the very sword of justice, is cutting off one by one, the fine and invisible fibres that bind the soul to happiness; and then, by all the love of happiness such a man must be interested, and concerned for himself. Or, tell the bad man that he must be converted, or he cannot be happy hereafter, and you declare to him an impressive truth; but how much would it add to the impression, if instead of leaving him to suppose that bare conversion—in the popular sense of that term—that the brief work of an hour, would bring him to heaven, you should say

to him, "you shall be just as happy hereafter, as you are pure and upright, and no more; you shall be just as happy as your character prepares you to be, and no more; your moral, like your mental character, though it may take its date or its impulse from a certain moment, is not formed in a moment; your character, that is to say, the habit of your mind, is the result of many thoughts, and feelings, and efforts, and these are bound together by many natural and strong ties, so that it is strictly true, and this is the great law of retribution: that all coming experience is to be affected by every present feeling; that every future moment of being must answer for every present moment; that one moment, sacrificed to sin or lost to improvement, is for ever sacrificed and lost; that one year's delay, or one hour's wilful delay, to enter the right path is to put you back so far, in the everlasting pursuit of happiness; and that every sin—ay, every sin of a good man, is thus to be answered for, though not according to the full measure of its ill-desert, yet according to a rule of unbending rectitude and impartiality. This is undoubtedly the strict and solemn Law of Retribution: but how much its strictness has really entered—I say not now into our hearts and lives; I will take up that serious question in another season of meditation—but how much the strictness of the principle of retribution has entered into our theories, our creeds, our speculations, is a matter that deserves attention.

It is worthy of remark, indeed, that there is *no* doctrine which is more universally received, and at the same time, more universally evaded, than this very doctrine which we are considering. It is universally

received because the very condition of human exist ence involves it—because it is a matter of experience; every after period of life being affected, and known to be affected, by the conduct of every earlier period; manhood by youth, and age by manhood; professional success, by the preparation for it; domestic happiness, by conjugal fidelity and parental care. It is thus seen, that life is a tissue, into which the thread of this connection is every where interwoven. It is thus seen that the law of retribution presses upon every man, whether he thinks of it or not; that it pursues him through all the courses of life, with a step that never falters nor tires, and with an eye that never sleeps nor slumbers. The doctrine of a future retribution has been universally received, too, because it has been felt that in no other way, could the impartiality of God's government be vindicated; that if the best and the worst men in the world, if the ruthless oppressor and his innocent victim, if the proud and boasting injurer, and the meek and patient sufferer, are to go to the same reward, to the same approbation of the good and just God; there is an end of all discrimination, of all moral government, and of all light upon the mysteries of providence. It has been felt, moreover, that character carries with it, and in its most intimate nature, the principles of retribution, and that it must work out weal or wo for its possessor.

But this doctrine so universally received, has been, I say, as universally evaded. The classic mythologies of paganism did, indeed, teach that there were infernal regions; but few were doomed to them, and for those few, who, failing of the rites of sepulture, or of some other ceremonial qualification, were liable to that

doom, an escape was provided by their wandering on the banks of the Styx awhile, as preparatory to their entering Elysium. So, too, the creed of the Catholics, though it spoke of hell, had, also, its purgatory to soften the horrors of retribution. And now there are, as I think, among the body of Protestants, certain speculative, or rather, may I say, mechanical views of the future state, and of the preparation for it, and of the principles of mercy in its allotments, that tend to let down the strictness of that law, which for ever binds us to the retributive future.

Is it not a question, let me barely ask in passing, whether this universal evasion does not show that the universal belief has been extravagant; whether men have not believed too much, to believe it strictly and specifically to its minutest point? It certainly is a very striking fact, that while the popular creed teaches that almost the whole living world is going down to everlasting torments, the popular sympathy interposes to save from that doom, almost the whole dying world.

But not to dwell on this observation,—I shall proceed now briefly to consider some of those modern views, which detract from the strictness of the law of retribution.

I. And the first which I shall notice is the view of the actual scene of retribution, as consisting of two conditions, entirely opposite, and altogether different. Mankind according to this view are divided into two distinct classes, the one of which is to enjoy infinite happiness, and the other to suffer infinite misery. It is a far stronger case, than would be made by the supposition, that man's varied efforts to gain worldly good, were to be rewarded by assigning to one por

tion of the race, boundless wealth, and to the other, absolute poverty; for it is infinite happiness on the one hand, and, not the bare destitution of it, but infinite misery, on the other.

Let me observe, before I proceed farther to point out what I consider to be the defect which attends this popular view of retribution, that the view itself is not warranted by scripture. The Bible teaches us that virtue will be rewarded and sin punished; that the good shall receive good, and the evil shall receive evil; and that is all that it teaches us. It unfolds to us this simple, and solemn, and purely spiritual issue, and nothing more.

All else is figurative; and so the most learned interpreters have generally agreed to consider it. It is obvious, that representations of what passes in the future world, taken from the present world, must be of this character. When heaven is represented as a city, and hell as a deep abyss, and Christ is described as coming to judgment on a throne, with the state and splendour of an Oriental monarch, and separating, *in form and visibly* separating the righteous from the wicked, we know, or should know, that these representations are figurative descriptions of a single and simple fact; and this fact is, and this is the whole of the fact that is taught us, that a distinction will be made between good men and bad men; and that they will be rewarded or punished hereafter, according to the character they have formed and sustained here.

It is to be remembered, too, in appealing to the Scriptures, that there are other teachings in them than those which are figurative, and teachings which bind us far more to the letter. It is written, that whatsoever

a man soweth, that shall he also reap; and that God will render unto every man according to his deeds—i. e. according to his character, as by deeds is doubtless meant in this instance.

But now to return to the view already stated, I maintain, that the boundless distinction which it makes in the states of the future life, is *not* rendering unto men according to their deeds; that is to say, according to their character. Because, of this character, there are many diversities, and degrees, and shades. Men differ in virtue, precisely as they differ in intelligence; by just as many, and imperceptible degrees. As many as are the diversities of moral education in the world, as numerous as are the shades of circumstance in life, as various as are the degrees of moral capacity and effort, in various minds, so must the results differ. If character were formed by machinery, there might be but two samples. But if it is formed by voluntary agency, the results must be as diversified and complicated as the operations of that agency. And the fact, which every man's observation must show him, undoubtedly is, that virtue in men differs just as intelligence does; differs, I repeat, by just as many and imperceptible degrees. But now suppose that men were to be rewarded for their intelligence hereafter. Would all the immense variety of cases be met by two totally different and opposite allotments? Take the scale of character, and mark on it, all the degrees of difference, and all the divisions of a degree. Now what point on the scale will you select, at which to make the infinite difference of allotments? Select it where you will, and there will be the thousandth part of a degree above, rewarded with perfect happiness, and a thousandth part of a de-

gree below, doomed to perfect misery. Would this be right, with regard to the intelligence, or virtue of men?

We are misled on this subject by that loose and inaccurate division of mankind, which is common, into the two classes of saints and sinners. We might as well say that all men are either strong or weak, wise or foolish, intellectual or sensual. So they are, in a general sense; but not in a sense, that excludes all discrimination. And the language of the Bible when it speaks of the good and bad, of the righteous and wicked, is to be understood with the same reasonable discrimination; with the same reasonable qualification of its meaning, as when it speaks of the rich and poor. The truth is, the matter of fact is, that from the highest point of virtue, to the lowest point of wickedness, there are, I repeat, innumerable steps, and men are standing upon all these steps; they are actually found in all these gradations of character. Now to render to such beings according to their character, is not to appoint to them two totally distinct and opposite allotments, but just as many allotments as there are shades of moral difference between them.

But does not the Bible speak of two distinct classes of men as amenable to the judgment, and of *but* two; and does it not say of the one class, "these shall go away into everlasting fire," and of the other, "but the righteous into life eternal?" Certainly it does. And so do we constantly say, that the good shall be happy, and the bad shall be miserable in the coming world. But do we, or does the Bible intend to speak without any discrimination? Especially, can the omniscient scrutiny and the unerring rule be supposed to overlook

any, even the slightest differences and the most delicate shades of character? On the contrary, we are told that "one star, differeth from another in glory;" and we are told that there is a "lowest hell:" and we are led to admit that in the allotments of retributive justice, the best among bad men, and the worst among good men, may come as near to each other in condition, as they come in character.

I am not saying, let it be observed, that the difference even in this case, is unimportant; still less that it is so, in general. Nay, and the difference between the states of the very good man and of the very bad man, may indeed be as great as any theory supposes; it may be much greater, in fact, than any man's imagination conceives; but this is not the only difference that is to be brought into the final account; for there are many intermediate ranks between the best and the worst. I say, that the difference of allotment may—nay, and that it must be great. The truly good man, the devoted Christian, shall doubtless experience a happiness beyond his utmost expectation. The bad man, the self-indulgent, the self-ruined man, will doubtless find his doom severer than he had looked for. I say not what it may be. But this, at least, we may be sure of, that the consequences both of good and bad conduct, will be more serious, will strike deeper, than we are likely, amidst the gross and dim perceptions of sense, to comprehend.

But this is not the point which I am at present arguing. It is not the extent of the consequences; but it is the strict and discriminating impartiality which shall measure out those affecting results: it is the strict law by which every man shall reap the fruits

of that which he sows. And I say that the artificial, imaginative, and, as I think, unauthorized, ideas which prevail with regard to a future life, let down the strictness of the law.

Let me now illustrate this by a single supposition. Suppose that you were to live in *this* world, one thousand or ten thousand years; and suppose, too, that you felt that every present moment was a probation for every future moment; and that in order to be happy, you must be pure; that every fault, every wrong habit of life or feeling, would tend, and would continue, to make you unhappy, till it was faithfully and effectually corrected; and corrected by yourself—not by the hand of death, not by the exchange of worlds. Suppose yourself to entertain the conviction, that if you plunged into self-indulgence and sin, diseases and distempers and woes would accumulate upon you—with no friendly interposition or rescue, no all-healing nostrum, no medicine of sovereign and miraculous efficacy to save—that diseases, I say, and distempers and woes would accumulate upon you, in dark and darkening forms, for a thousand years. Suppose that every evil passion, anger, or avarice, or envy, or selfishness in any of its forms, would—unless resisted and overcome, —would make you more and more miserable, for a thousand years. I say, that such a prospect limited as it is in comparison, would be more impressive and salutary, a more powerful restraint upon sin, a more powerful stimulus to improvement, than the prospect, as it is usually contemplated, of the retributions of eternity! Are we then making all that we ought to make, of the prospect of an eternal retribution? God's justice will be as strict there, as it is here. And

although bodily diseases may not accumulate upon us there, yet the diseases of the soul, if we take not heed to them, will accumulate upon us; and he who has only one degree of purity, and ten degrees of sin in him, must not lay that flattering unction to his soul, that death will "wash out the long arrears of guilt." I know that this is a doctrine of unbending strictness—a doctrine, I had almost said, insufferably strict; but I believe that it is altogether true.

"But," some one may say, "if I am converted; if I have repented of my sins, and believed on the Lord Jesus Christ, then, I have the assurance, through God's mercy, of pardon and heaven."

This statement embraces the other doctrinal evasion of the law of retribution which I proposed to consider. And I must venture to express the apprehension that, by those who answer thus to the strict and unaccommodating demand of inwrought purity, neither conversion, nor repentance, nor the mercy of God, are understood as they ought to be.

A man says, "I am not to be judged by the law, but by the Gospel." But when he says that, let me tell him, he should take care to know what he says and whereof he affirms. The difference between the Law and the Gospel, I believe, is much misapprehended in this respect. The Gospel is not a more easy, not a more lax rule to walk by, but only a more encouraging rule. The Law demands rectitude, and declares that the sinner deserves the miseries of a future life; and there it stops, and of course it leaves the offender in despair. The Gospel comes in—and it did come in, with its teaching and prophetic sacrifices, even amidst the thunders of Sinai—saying, If thou wilt re-

pent and believe, if thou wilt embrace the faith and spirit of the all-humbling and all-redeeming religion, the way to happiness is still open. But does the Gospel do any more than open the way? Does it make the way more easy, more indulgent, less self-denying? Does it say, you need not be as good as the Law requires, and yet you shall be none the less happy for all that? Does it say, You need not do as well, and yet it shall be just as well with you? "Is Christ the minister of sin? God forbid!" Nay, be it remembered that the solemn declaration upon which we are this day meditating—whatsoever a man soweth that shall he also reap—is recorded not in the law, but in the Gospel.

"But if I repent," it may be said, "am I not forgiven entirely?" If you repent entirely, you are forgiven entirely; and not otherwise. What *is* repentance? It is a change of mind. That, as every scholar knows, is the precise meaning of the original word in the scriptures, which is translated repentance. It is a change of mind. If, then, your repentance, your change of mind, is entire, your forgiveness, your happiness is complete; but on no other principle, and in no other proportion. Sorrow, is only one of the indications of this repentance, or change of heart; though it has, unfortunately, usurped, in common use, the whole meaning of the word. Sorrow is not the only indication of repentance; for joy as truly springs from it. It is not therefore the bare fact, that you are sorry, however sincerely and disinterestedly sorry, for your offences, that will deliver you from all the suffering which your sins and sinful habits must occasion. You may be sorry, for instance, and truly sorry,

for your anger; yet if the passion breaks out again, it must again give you pain; and it must for ever give you pain, while it lives. You may grieve for your vices. Does that grief instantly stop the course of penalty? Will it instantly repair a shattered constitution? You may regret, in declining life, a state of mind produced by too much devotion to worldy gain —the want of intellectual and moral resources and habits. Will the dearth and the desolation depart from your mind, when that regret enters it? Will even the tears of repentance immediately cause freshness and verdure to spring up in your path?

"But," it may be said, once more, "does not all depend on our being converted, or being born again? And is not conversion, is not the new birth, the event of a moment?"

I answer with all the certainty of conviction that I am capable of—no; it is not the event of a moment. That conversion which fits a soul for heaven is *not* the event of a moment. And, my brethren, I would not answer thus in a case, where there is controversy, if I did not think it a matter of the most serious importance. Can any thing be more fatal—can any one of all loose doctrines be more loose, than to tell an offender who is going to the worst excesses in sin, that he may escape all the evil results—all the results of fifty, sixty, seventy years of self-indulgence—by one instant's experience? Can any one of us believe—dare we believe, that one moment's virtue can prepare us for the happiness of eternity? Can we believe this, especially, when we are, on every page of the Bible, commanded to watch, and pray, and strive, and labour, and by patient continuance in well-doing,

to seek for glory, and honour, and immortality; and this, as the express condition of obtaining eternal life or happiness?

No, Christians! subjects of the Christian law!—no conversion, no repentance, no mercy of heaven, will save you from the final operation of that sentence, or should save you from its warning now—"Be not deceived"—as if there was special danger of being deceived here—"be not deceived; God is not mocked; for whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap: he that soweth to the flesh, shall of his flesh reap corruption; but he that soweth to the spirit, shall of the spirit reap life everlasting."

It is a high, and strict—I had almost said—a terrible discrimination. Yet let us bring it home to our hearts; although it be as a sword to cut off some cherished sin. Oh! this miserable and slavish folly of inquiring whether we have enough piety and virtue to save us! Do men ever talk thus about the acquisition of riches or honours? Do they act, as if all their solicitude was to ascertain and to stop at, the point that would just save them from want, or secure them from disgrace? "Enough virtue to save you"—do you say? The very question shows that you have not enough. It shows that your views of salvation are yet technical, and narrow—if not selfish. It shows that all your thoughts of retribution yet turn to solicitude and apprehension.

The law of retribution is the law of God's goodness. It addresses not only the fear of sin, but the love of improvement. Its grand requisition is that of progress. It urges us at every step to press forward And however many steps we may have taken, it urges

us still to take another and another, by the same pressing reason with which it urged us to take the first step.

Yes, by the same pressing reason. Let him who thinks himself a good man, who thinks that he is converted, and is on the right side, and in the safe state, and in the way to heaven, and who, nevertheless, from this false reasoning and this presumptuous security, indulges in little sins—irritability, covetousness, or worldly pride—let him know that his doom shall be hereafter, and is now, a *kind of hell*, compared with the blessedness in store for loftier virtue, and holier piety; and let him know, too, that compared with that loftier standard, he has almost as much reason to tremble for himself, as the poor sinner he looks down upon. For if woes are denounced against the impenitent sinner, so are woes denounced, in terms scarcely less awful, against the secure, lukewarm, negligent Christian. God is no respecter of persons, nor of professions. It is written that "he will render to *every* man, according to his deeds." It is written, too, that "*whatsoever* a man soweth, that shall he also reap."

I repeat that language of fearful discrimination, "*whatsoever*—a man *soweth*—*that*—not something else—*that*—shall he also *reap*." That which you *are doing*—be it good or evil, be it grave or gay—that which you are doing to-day and to-morrow,—each thought, each feeling, each action, each event; every passing hour, every breathing moment, is contributing to form the character by which you are to be judged. Every particle of influence that goes to form that aggregate, your character, shall, in that future scrutiny,

be sifted out from the mass, and shall fall, particle by particle, with ages perhaps intervening—shall fall, a distinct contribution to the sum of your joys or your woes. Thus every idle word, every idle hour, shall give answer in the judgment. Think not, against the closeness and severity of this inquisition, to put up any barrier of theological speculation. Conversion, repentance, pardon, mean they what they will, mean nothing that will save you from reaping, down to the very root and ground of good or evil, that which you have sowed. Think not to wrap that future world in any blackness of darkness, or any folding flame, as if, for the imagination to be alarmed, were all you had to feel, or fear. Clearly, distinctly shall the voice of accusation fall upon the guilty ear; as when upon earth, the man of crime comes reluctantly forth from his hiding-place, and stands at the bar of his country's justice, and the voices of his associates say, "thou didst it!" If there be any unchangeable, any adamantine fate in the universe, this is that fate—that the future shall for ever bring forth the fruits of the past.

Take care, then, what thou sowest, as if thou wert taking care for eternity. That sowing, of which the scripture speaketh, what is it? Yesterday, perhaps, some evil temptation came upon you—the opportunity of unrighteous gain, or of unhallowed indulgence, came, either in the sphere of business, or of pleasure, of society, or of solitude. If you yielded to it, then and there, did you plant a seed of bitterness and sorrow. To-morrow, it may be, will threaten discovery; and agitated, alarmed, you will cover the sin, and bury it deeper, in falsehood and hypocrisy. In the hiding bosom, in the fruitful soil of kindred vices, that

sin dies not, but thrives and grows; and other, and still other germs of evil gather around the accursed root, till from that single seed of corruption, there springs up in the soul all that is horrible in habitual lying, knavery, or vice. Long before such a life comes to its close, its poor victim may have advanced within the very precincts of hell. Yes, the hell of debt, of disease, of ignominy, or of remorse, may gather its shadows around the steps of the transgressor even on earth; and yet these,—if holy scripture be unerring, and sure experience be prophetic—these are but the beginnings of sorrows. The evil deed may be done alas! in a moment—in one fatal moment; but conscience never dies; memory never sleeps: guilt never can become innocence; and remorse can never, never whisper peace. Pardon may come from heaven; but self-forgiveness may never come.

Beware then, thou who art tempted to evil—and every being before me is tempted to evil—beware what thou layest up for the future; beware what thou layest up in the archives of eternity. Thou who wouldst wrong thy neighbour, beware! lest the thought of that injured man, wounded and suffering from thine injury, be a pang which a thousand years may not deprive of its bitterness. Thou who wouldst break into the house of innocence, and rifle it of its treasure, beware! lest, when a thousand ages have rolled their billows over thee, the moan of its distress may not have died away from thine ear. Thou who wouldst build the desolate throne of ambition in thy heart, beware what thou art doing with all thy devices, and circumventings, and selfish schemings! lest desolation and loneliness be on thy path as it stretches into

the long futurity. Thou, in fine, who art living a negligent and irreligious life, beware! beware how thou livest—for bound up with that life is the immutable principle of an endless retribution—bound up with that life are elements of God's creating, which shall never spend their force,—which shall be unfolding and unfolding with the ages of eternity. Beware! I say once more, and be not deceived. *Be not deceived;* God is not mocked; God who has formed thy nature thus to answer to the future, is not mocked; his law can never be abrogated, his justice can never be eluded; beware, then—be forewarned; since, for ever, and for ever will it be true, that whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap!

DISCOURSE XIII.

THE LAW OF RETRIBUTION.

GALATIANS 6. 7. BE NOT DECEIVED; GOD IS NOT MOCKED; FOR WHATSOEVER A MAN SOWETH, THAT SHALL HE ALSO REAP.

THE views which are usually presented of a future retribution, are characterized, as I have observed in my last discourse, rather by strength than by strictness of representation. The great evil attending the com mon statements of this doctrine, I shall now venture to say, is, not that they are too alarming. Men are not enough alarmed at the dangers of a sinful course. No men are; no men, though they sit under the most terrifying dispensation of preaching that ever was devised. But the evil is, that alarm is addressed too much to the imagination, and too little to the reason and conscience. Neither Whitfield, nor Baxter, nor Edwards,—though the horror produced by his celebrated sermon "on the justice of God in the damnation of sinners," is a matter of tradition in New England, to this very day—yet, no one of them ever preached too much terror, though they may have preached it too exclusively; but the evil was that they preached terror, I repeat, too much to the imagination, and too little to the reason and conscience. Of mere fright, there may be too much; but of real, rational fear, there

never *can* be too much. Sin, vice, a corrupt mind, a guilty life, and the woes naturally flowing from these, never can be too much dreaded. It is one thing, for the preacher to deal in mathematical calculations of infinite suffering, to dwell upon the eternity of hell-torments, to speak of literal fires, and of burning in them for ever; and with these representations, it is easy to scare the imagination, to awaken horror, and a horror so great, as to be at war with the clear, calm, and faithful discriminations of conscience. With such means, it is easy to produce a great excitement in the mind. But he who should, or who *could*, unveil the realities of a strict and spiritual retribution, show what every sinner loses, show what every sinner must suffer, in and through the very character he forms, show, too, how bitterly every good man must sorrow for every sin, here or hereafter, show, in fine, what sin is, and for ever must be, to an immortal nature, would make an impression more deep, and sober, and effectual.

It is not my purpose at present to attempt any detail of this nature, though I shall be governed by the observations I have made, in the views which I *am* to present, and for which I venture to ask a rational, and calm, and most serious consideration.

The future is to answer for the present. This is the great law of retribution. And so obviously necessary and just is it; so evidently does our character create our welfare or wo; so certainly must it give us pain or pleasure, as long as it goes with us, whether in this world or another world, that it seems less requisite to support the doctrine by argument, than to save it from evasions.

There are such evasions. No theology has yet come

up to the strictness of this law. It is still more true, that no practice has yet come up to it. There are theoretical evasions,—and I think they are to be found in the views which are often presented, of conversion, and repentance, and of God's mercy, and the actual scenes of retribution; but there is one practical evasion, one into which the whole world has fallen, and so dangerous, so momentous in its danger, that it may well deserve, for one season of meditation, I believe, to engross our entire and undivided attention.

This grand evasion, this great and fatal mistake, may be stated in general terms to be, *the substitution of something as a preparation for future happiness, in place of devoting the whole life to it;* or to a course which is fitted to procure it. This evasion takes the particular form, perhaps, of an expectation that some sudden and extraordinary experience may, at a future time, accomplish what is necessary to prepare the mind for happiness and heaven; or that certain circumstances, such as sickness and affliction, may, at some subsequent period of life, force the growth of that, which is not cultivated now, and may thus remedy the fearful and fatal neglect; or it is an expectation—and this is the most prevalent form of the error,—that old age or death, when it comes, will have power to penetrate the heart with emotion, and subdue it to repentance, and prepare it for heaven. The subject—yet, it must be feared to be the victim—of this stupendous error, is convinced that in order to be happy eventually, he must become pure;—there is no principle of indulgence, there is no gospel of mercy, that can absolve him from that necessity—he must become pure; he must be pious; his nature must be exalted and re-

fined. It is his nature, his mind, that is to be happy, and he is convinced by experience, that his mind must be cultivated, purified, prepared, for that end. But he is not doing this work to-day, nor does he expect to do it to-morrow; he is not doing it this month, nor does he expect to do it next month; he is not doing it this year, nor does he, in particular, expect to do it next year; and thus, month after month, and year after year are passing, and one season of life after another is stealing away: and the only hope is, that in some tremendous exigency, or by some violent paroxysm, when fear and remorse and disease and death, are darkly struggling together, *that* may be done, for which the whole previous course of life has not been found sufficient.

But is it true—for I am willing to pause at this point, and deliberately to consider the question—is it true, can it be true, some one may ask, that a mistake so gross, so irrational, so at war with all that we know about character, about its formation, and its necessary results—can it be true, that such a mistake, about the whole vast concern of our happiness, is actually made by any of us? Can it be, you will say, that men, with reason, and experience, and Scripture to guide them; can it be that men, in their senses, are substituting in place of that deliberate formation of their character for happiness, for which life is given, some brief preparation for it, at a future period, and especially at the last period of their lives?

I am persuaded that it is true, my brethren, however strange; and these are the considerations that convince me of it.

In the first place there are multitudes around us, that hope and expect to be happy hereafter, who are

conscious, that they are not preparing for it; who acknowledge at every successive stage of life, that if they were instantly to die, without any further opportunity to prepare for it, there would be little or no hope for them; who feel that, if the very character which they are now, every day, forming, were to go to the judgment, their case would be desperate; who hope therefore, most evidently, not to be judged by the prevailing tenor of their lives, but secretly expect to do something at last, to retrieve the errors, the follies, and sins, which they are now daily committing.

Again; although it is a common impression, that but *few* LIVE in an habitual preparation for heaven, the impression is almost *as* common, that but few actually *die* unprepared. Of almost every individual, who leaves the world, something is told, which encourages the hopes of survivers concerning him. I stand before you, my brethren, as a Christian minister, and I solemnly declare, that familiar as I have been with that sad and mournful scene, the death of the wicked, it has almost invariably left this strange and delusive hope behind it. Indeed, the extreme solicitude with which every symptom of preparation is marked in these circumstances, the trembling anxiety with which every word and look, is caught, but too plainly indicate the same impression. What the amount of this proof is, we will presently consider. It is sufficient at this point of the inquiry, to state, that it is collected and arranged as carefully, and offered as confidently, as if it were material; that it encourages those who repeat and those who hear it; that the instance of death is very rare, in which surviving friends do not tell you that they trust and believe that all is well. Even when a man

has led an eminently pious life, many are apt to feel as if the proof of his piety, was not consummated, unless he had died a happy and triumphant death: as though it were to be expected—it may happen so, indeed, and we have great cause to thank God when it does—but as though it were to be expected, and looked for as a matter of course, that in feebleness and distress of body and mind, and the sinking of all the faculties, the mind should exhibit its utmost energy—as if, amidst the cold damps of death, the expiring flame of sensibility should rise the highest. It is to be feared that good men and with the best intentions, no doubt, have yet given great distress to many faithful Christians, and done great injury to others, by countenancing this unreasonable notion. The great question is, not how a good man dies, but how he has *lived.*

The third and final reason, which convinces me of the prevalence of this mistake, which I am considering, is the almost universal dread of sudden death. It is not to be denied, indeed, that a change so great, as that of death, and so mysterious too, is, in itself, and naturally, fitted to awaken a feeling of apprehension. But I maintain, that the principal reason for this apprehension, is the fear of consequences, "the dread of something *after* death;" and that there is a vague hope in almost every mind, that some preparation could be made, at the last, if only a little time, were granted for it. And indeed, if we all entertained a settled conviction that, we are to reap as we have sowed, that we are to be miserable or happy in the other world, according to the character we have formed in this, that we are to be judged by the life we

live, and not by the death we die; what would it import to us, whether we fell suddenly, in the paths of life, or slowly declined from them—whether we sunk at once beneath the stroke of an apoplexy, or more slowly under the attack of a consumption? Something, it would import to us, no doubt, as friends; for we should wish to give our dying counsels; but as expectants of retribution, what could the time of a week or a month's last sickness avail us? I will answer: and I say, as much,—by the most favourable supposition,—as much as such a space of time, in any part of life could avail us; and no more.

Such then and so fearful, and proved to be so fearful by the plainest indications, is the moral state of multitudes. Life is given them for the cultivation of a sacred virtue, of a lofty piety, of pure and godlike affections, as the only way to future improvement and happiness. They are not devoting life, to this end; they know they are not; they confess they are not; and their hope is—yes, the hope, on which they rest their whole being is, that by some hasty effort or paroxysm of emotion, in the feeble and helpless time of sickness, or in the dark day of death, they shall be able to redeem the lost hope of a negligent life. If only a week or a month of health were offered them to prepare; if that specific time, a week or a month, were taken out from the midst of life, and they were solemnly told that this would be all the time they would have to prepare for eternity, they would be in despair; and yet they hope to do this, in a month or a week of pain and languishment and distracting agitation. It is, as if the husbandman should sport away the summer season, and then should think to retrieve his error,

by planting his fields in the autumn. It is as if the student should trifle away the season appointed for his education, and then, when the time came for entering upon his profession, should think to make up for his deficiencies, by a few weeks of violent, hurried and irregular application. It shows, alas! that the world, with all its boasts of an enlightened age, has not yet escaped the folly of those days of superstition, when the eucharist was administered to dying persons, and was forcibly administered, if the patient had no longer sense to receive it; or when men deferred their baptism till death; as if the future state were to depend on these last ceremonies. And as well depend on ceremonies—and more consistently could we do so,—as depend on any momentary preparation for happiness. As well build a church or a monastery to atone for our sins, as to build that fabric of error in our imagination.

It is not for us, I know, to limit the Almighty! It is not for us to say, that he cannot change the soul in the last moments of its stay on earth. But this we may fearlessly say; that he does it, if at all, by a miraculous agency, of whose working we can have no conception, and of whose results, by the very supposition, we can have no knowledge.

I desire, my brethren, to state this point with all sufficient caution. I not only do not deny, that God has power to convert the soul in the last moments of life, but I do not absolutely deny that there may be some such instances in the passing away of every generation. I do not know, and none of us can know, whether such miracles are performed or not. It is commonly thought that the case recorded in Luke's

Gospel, of the thief on the cross, is an instance of this nature. But I do not think it can be pronounced to be such. We know not how much time he may have had, to repent and form a new character. He says, "we indeed suffer justly;" but the act for which he suffered, may have been a single act, in which he had fallen from a generally good life. But admit that such interpositions do take place; is it safe to rely upon them? We do not know that they do. We do not know, that in the passing away of all the generations of mankind, there has been one such instance. Is it safe to rely, in so tremendous a case, upon what we do not know, and upon what, after all, may never be? My object is to show that it is not safe; and for this purpose, I shall reason upon the general principle. The general principle is that the future must answer for the present; the future of this life, for the present of this life; the next month, for this month: the next year for this year; and in the same way the next life for this life. I say, then, that the expectation of any hasty retrieving of a bad month, of a bad year, of a bad life, is irrational, and unwarrantable, and ought to be considered as desperate.

I. And for the purpose of showing this, I observe, in the first place, that the expectation of preparing for futurity hastily, or by any other means, than the voluntary and deliberate formation of right and virtuous habits in the mind; or that the expectation of preparing for death when it comes, is opposed to the professed import of that Sacred Volume, which gives law alike to our hopes and our fears.

It is opposed to the obvious, and the professed, and the leading character of the Bible. What is that

character? What is the Bible? It is a revelation of laws, motives, directions, and excitements, to religious virtue. But all of these are useless, if this character is to be formed by a miraculous energy, at a perilous conjuncture, or in a last moment. Motives must be contemplated, directions must be understood, excitements must be felt, to be effectual; and all this must be done deliberately, must be many times repeated, must be combined with diligence and patience and faith, and must be slowly, as every thing is slowly wrought into the character, in order to be effectual.

But it may be said, "if the rule is so strict, where is the *mercy* of the Gospel?" I answer, that its very mercy is engaged to make us pure; that its mercy would be no mercy, if it did not do this; and that, of becoming pure and good, there is but one way; and that is the way of voluntary effort—an effort to be assisted by divine grace, indeed, but none the less, on that account, an effort and an endeavour, a watching and a striving, a conflict, and a victory. I answer, again; that the mercy of the Gospel is a moral and rational, a high and glorious principle. It is not a principle of laxity, in morals. It is not a principle of indulgence, to the heart. It is a moral principle, and not a wonder-working machinery, by which a man is to be lifted up and borne away from guilt to purity, from earth to heaven, he knows not how. It offers to fabricate no wings for the immortal flight. It is a rational principle; and is not based upon the subversion of all the laws of experience and wisdom. The Gospel opens the *way* to heaven—opens the way, to poor, sinful, ill-deserving creatures. Is not that, mercy enough? Shall the guilty and lost spurn that, and de-

mand more? It opens the way, I repeat; but then, it lays its instructions, commands, and warnings thickly upon that way. With unnumbered directions to faith, and patience, and prayer, and toil, and self-denial, it marks out every step of that way. It tells us, again and again, that *such* is its way of salvation, and no other. In other words, it offers us happiness, and prescribes the terms. And those terms, if they were of a meaner character, if they were low and lax, would degrade even our nature, and we could not respect them. It would, in fact, be no mercy to natures like ours, to treat them in any other way.

In speaking of the scriptural representations on this subject, the parable of "the labourers in the vineyard" may probably occur to you, in which he who came at the eleventh hour, received as much as he who had borne the heat and burden of the day. I suppose the parable has no relation whatever to this subject. It cannot intend to teach that he who is a Christian during his whole life, is no more an object of the divine approbation, and is to be no more happy, than he who is so, for a very small part of it. It evidently refers to the introduction of the Christian dispensation; it relates to the Jews and Gentiles, as nations: meaning that the Gentiles, who came later into covenant with God, would be as favourably received as the Jews.

To interpret this parable as encouraging men to put off their preparation for futurity till death, if there were no other objection, would contradict, I repeat, all the scriptural information we have on this subject. This would appear, if you should carry to the oracles of divine truth, any question whatever, about piety, or virtue, or the qualification for heaven. What is piety

itself? A momentary exercise; or a habit? Something thrown into the heart in a mass; or a state of the heart itself, formed by long effort and care? Does the great qualification for heaven consist in one, two or ten good exercises; or in a good character? And to what is that judgment to relate, which will decide our future condition? "Who will render, says the sacred record, to every man according to his deeds!"

Open that most solemn and formal account of the judgment contained in the 25th chapter of Matthew; and what is the great test? I still answer, deeds; deeds of piety and charity, the conduct, the character, the permanent affections of each individual. But still further to decide the question, if it can be necessary, let it be asked, what is that heaven of which we hear and say so much? What is heaven? Are we still, like children, fancying that heaven is a beautiful city, into which one needs only the powers of locomotion to enter? Do we not know that heaven is in the mind; in the greatness and purity and elevation of our immortal nature? If piety and virtue then are a habit and state of mind expressed and acted out in a life, that is holy; if the judgment has relation to this alone; if heaven consist in this; what hope can there be in a brief and slight preparation?

II. No, my friends, the terms on which we receive happiness—and I now appeal to reason in the second place—the terms on which we receive true, moral, satisfying happiness, cannot be easy. They are not; experience shows that they are not; life shows that they are not; and eternity will but develop the same strict law; for it is a part of our nature; it is a part of the nature and reason of things. The senses may

yield us such pleasure as they can yield, without effort; taste may delight us, and imagination may minister to us, in careless reverie; but conscience does not offer to us its happiness on such terms. I know not what may be the law for other beings, in some other sphere; but I know that no truly, morally, happy being was ever made here, but through much effort, long culture, frequent self-denial, and abiding faith, patience, and prayer. To be truly happy—what is so difficult? What is so rare? And is heaven, think you—the blessed consummation of all that man can ask,—to be obtained at less expense than it will cost to gain one pure, calm day upon earth? For even this comparatively trifling boon, one blessed day, one day of religious joy, one day of joy in meditation and prayer, one day of happiness that is spiritual, and not physical nor circumstantial—even this comparatively slight boon, I say, cannot be gained without long preparation of mind, and heart, and habit. There are multitudes around us and of us, to whom, at this moment, one such day's happiness is a thing just as impossible, as it would be in that day to make a world! And shall they think to escape this very law of happiness under which they are actually living, and to fly away to heaven on the wings of imagination?—to pass at once from unfaithfulness to reward, from apathy to ecstasy, from the neglect and dislike of prayer to the blessed communion of heavenly worship, from this hour of being, absorbed in sense and the world, to an eternity of spiritual glory and triumph? No; be assured that facts are here, as they are every where, worth more than fancies—be they those of dreaming visionaries or ingenious theologians; if you

are not now happy in penitence, and humility, and prayer, and the love of God, you are not in fact prepared to be happy in them hereafter. No, between the actual state of mind prevailing in many, and the bliss of heaven, "there is a great gulf fixed"—over which no wing of mortal nor angel was ever spread. No; the law of essential, enduring, triumphant happiness, is labour and long preparation for it; and it is a law which will never, never—never be annulled!

There is a law, too, concerning habits. It is implied in the following language. "Can the Ethiopian change his skin, or the leopard his spots? Then may those who are accustomed to do evil, learn to do well." Habit is no slight bond. Slightly at first, and gently afterwards, may it have drawn its silken cords around us; but not so are its bonds to be cast from us; nor can they, like a green withe, be broken by one gigantic effort. No, the bonds of habit are chains and fetters, that must be worn off. Through the long process of slow and imperceptible degrees, they must be severed with weariness, and galling, and bitter anguish.

"Can it be supposed," says an eloquent writer, and preacher, "that, where the vigour of life has been spent in the establishment of vicious propensities; where all the vivacity of youth, and all the soberness of manhood, and all the wisdom of old age, have been given to the service of sin; where vice has been growing with the growth, and strengthening with the strength; where it has spread out with the limbs of the stripling, and become rigid with the fibres of the aged—can it, I say, be supposed, that the labours of such a life, are to be overthrown by one last exertion

of the mind, impaired with disease; by the convulsive exercise of an affrighted spirit; and by the inarticulate and feeble sounds of an expiring breath?"

Besides, the rule is as equitable, as in the divine ordination of things, it is necessary. The judgment which ordains that whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap, is a righteous judgment. It is easy no doubt, to regret a bad life, when it is just over. When death comes, and the man must leave his sinful indulgences and pleasures; or, when he has no longer any capacity for enjoying them; when sickness has enfeebled the appetites, or age has chilled the passions, then, indeed, is it but a slight sacrifice, and a yet poorer merit in him, to feel regret. But regret let it be considered, is not repentance! And while the former may be easy and almost involuntary, the other—the repentance—may be as hard, as the adverse tendencies of a whole life can make it. Yes, the hardest of all things then, will be to repent. Yes, I repeat, that which is relied upon to save a man, after the best part of life has been lost, has become by the very habits of that life, almost a moral impossibility.

And the regret, the selfish regret—can it be accepted? I ask not if it can be accepted by our Maker; I doubt not his infinite mercy; but can it be accepted by our own nature? Can our nature be purified by it? Can the tears of that dark hour of selfish sorrow, or the awful insensibility which no tear comes to relieve—can either of them purge away from the bosom the stains of a life of sin? Let us never make the fearful experiment! Let us not go down to the last tremendous scene of life—there, amidst pain and dis-

traction, with the work of life to do! Let us not have to acquire peace from very terror, and hope from very despair; let us not, thus, trust ourselves to a judgment," that will render unto us according to our deeds; that will render,—mark the explanation—to them, who by patient continuance in well doing, seek for glory, honour and immortality, eternal life; but tribulation and anguish to every soul that doeth evil."

III. From these views of our subject, drawn from scripture, and reason, let me, in the third and last place, refer to a no less decisive consideration which is independent of them; a consideration fully borne out by melancholy facts. It is this: that every man will die, very much as he lives: I mean, that in his character, his habits of feeling, he will. There is not this wide difference, between the living world and the dying world, which is generally supposed. Character, as I have contended, and as we all see, indeed, is not formed in a moment; it cannot, upon any known law or principle—it cannot, but in contradiction to every known law and principle, be changed in a moment. Christianity has introduced no law, in subversion of the great laws of experience, and rational motive, and moral action, or of its own established principles. Its doctrine of conversion is only misunderstood when it is supposed to provide a briefer and easier way of preparation for heaven, than watching and striving, and persevering in virtue, and patient continuance in well-doing. I say, therefore, and repeat the certain and solemn truth, that every man will die the same—essentially the same, that he has lived.

For the correctness of this conclusion, I have soon to refer to a single, and as it seems to me, momentous

fact. But in the meantime, let me remark that there is one question here, which I view with a kind of ap prehension I scarcely know how to express; with almost a dread, for once, to ask what the simple truth is.

My brethren, we are sometimes called upon to pray for a change of heart, in the sinful and negligent man, as he is drawing nigh, in horror and agony, his last hour! It is an awful situation even to him, who only ministers at that dying bed. What shall he *do*—what *can* be done?—I have asked myself. Shall I discourage prayer, even in the uttermost extremity? Can I, when I hear from those lips that are soon to be sealed in death, the pathetic entreaty, "Oh! pray"—can I refuse to pray? I do not; I cannot. Prayer is our duty; events are with God. But I must say, I will say—I will tell the negligent man beforehand, what I fear. I fear, I do fear, that such praying is nothing better than the supplication of our terror and despair! I fear, that it is altogether an irrational and unauthorized praying! I fear that it is like praying, that guilt, and even a whole life of it, may feel no enduring remorse, that sin may not be followed by sorrow, that vice may leap at once to the rewards of virtue, that the sword which a man has plunged into his bosom, may not wound him, or that the envenomed draught he has taken, may not poison! I fear that it is, as if we should take our station on the banks of the mighty river, that is pouring its accumulated waters into the ocean, and pray that they may turn back to their fountain-head; or as if we should gaze upon the descending sun in heaven, and pray that he may stand still in his course! I tremble with a strange misgiving, as if it were a praying not to God, but against God!

For, what *is* this prayer? It cannot harm us to make the inquiry now, before that crisis comes. What *is* this prayer? It *is* a prayer that the flow of moral habits may turn back to its source; that the great course of moral causes and effects may all be stopped; that the great laws of the moral universe may all be suspended. It *is* praying against many a solemn declaration of Holy Writ. And will it—I ask—will the prayer be heard? Again, I tremble, at that question: again, my misgivings come over me; I ask—but I know not what to answer. I know in fact—I may conjecture, and hope—but I *know* of no answer to that awful question, unless it be in this more awful language. "Be not deceived"—it sounds like a warning in my ear—"be not deceived: God is not mocked:"—man's indulgence may flatter him; plausible systems of his own devising may encourage him to venture his soul upon an easier way of salvation; and weaker bands than those of almighty justice might have been escaped, but—"God is not mocked; for whatsoever a man soweth"—not what he wishes, when the seeds of sin are implanted, and have sprung up, have grown to maturity—I cannot read it so—but, "whatsoever a man soweth, *that* shall he also reap."

Tell me not the oft-repeated tale, of a death-bed repentance. I turn to it an incredulous ear. What does it amount to, even when it comes with the kindest testimony of partial affection? Alas! it is doubtful, even in its utmost latitude, and in the moment when it claims our utmost sympathy. For what is it? It is, that the subject of this charitable judgment, was willing to die, when to die was inevitable; that he sought for pardon, when he felt that he must be pardoned or

perish in his sins: that he prayed, but it was when *Atheists* have prayed; that he hoped; ah! he hoped, when it had become too terrible to despair!

And now what is the result? What is it, that the issue of all this fearful, I cannot call it flattering, experience tells us? What is the fact, on which this solemn conclusion, concerning the inefficacy of a death-bed repentance, rests? In many cases it is revealed only in another world, and is beyond our scrutiny. But when it is known, I beg it may be solemnly considered what it is, and what is its bearing on the hopes of a death-bed repentance. The result is—and I speak, let it be repeated, of a fact—the result is almost without exception, in cases where the subject of such experience recovers, that he returns to his old habits of living, without any, or any but a very slight and temporary change. In many such instances, where the experience has been very bright and convincing, the individual retains no recollection of any thing he said, or was supposed to have felt. It was all a delirium. The moral state as well as the mental state, was all delirium. And there is too much reason to fear that all such experience is a moral delirium, at best.———I would not willingly disturb, for one moment, the peace of a fond and anxious friendship. I will not speak of the state of those, who are dead; but I must speak of the dangers of those, who are living. And surely, if there are any, this side of the retributions of eternity, who could most fear fully warn you not to postpone religion to a dying hour, it would be those, who have hung with anxious watchings around the last hours of the disobedient and irre-

ligious, and have trembled, and prayed, and wept, for their welfare!

My friends, I have only time to present to you and to myself, one practical question; *are we habitually ready to die?* The question, my brethren, is not, whether we expect to be ready at some future time. It is not whether we mean to be ready. It is not whether we are making the most solemn promises to ourselves that we will, some time, set about the preparation for that great hour. But the question is, are we ready for it now? Are we habitually ready? Are we convinced that we are to be judged not by some imaginary life which we intend, and intend, and for ever intend to lead, and which we never do lead, because we are always intending it—are we convinced, I say, that we are to be judged not by that imaginary life which we are for ever intending to lead, but by the life which we are now actually living? Have we given up the folly of expecting to do any thing in future, which we will not do now; of expecting to do that in sickness, which we cannot do in health; of expecting to do that in death, which we cannot do in life? Are we doing just as much to prepare as if the judgment were to depend on what we are doing—for it is to depend on what we are doing, and doing, and doing, through the whole of life—as much, I say, as if the judgment were to depend on these hourly deeds which we are now performing, on these momentary feelings which we are now cherishing?——If not, then, there ought to be a revolution in our lives—call it conversion, regeneration, a change of heart, I care not by what name—but, I say, that there ought to be a revolution in our lives, of such magnitude and mo-

ment, that the eternal judgment only can declare it! Are we, then, habitually ready to die? If not habitually, we never are, for religion is a habit. If not habitually; if not, at least, habitually *making* ourselves ready, there is reason to fear that we never shall be; for life—do you not perceive?—is a tissue of thoughts, purposes, and feelings, which is growing stronger, as it lengthens, so that the disinclination to prepare for death is growing every moment, while, every moment the time for it lessens.

There is a vague notion—for it is the hope of all that death will not break into the midst of life—a vague notion, with many, of retiring in advancing years from the cares and business of life to make this preparation, which involves great and hazardous mistake. They seem to think that the heart will become pure and spiritual and heavenly, as the state of life becomes quiet and free from the urgency of worldly cares. Delusive expectation!—as if all growth in nature were not most vigorous amidst calm and silence: as if, in like manner, the rooted passions of the soul were not likely to grow stronger and more stubborn, amidst the silence and quietude of declining years! What is the fact? Did you ever *see* selfishness, or avarice, or a worldly mind, lose its accustomed power in such circumstances? On the contrary, we know—who has not witnessed sad and striking instances of it—we know, that nothing is more common, than for avarice and worldliness to find strength in leisure and freedom in retirement; that they fix a stronger grasp upon the decaying faculties, and fling their icy bonds over the soul amidst the winter of age. As well might the Ethiopian change his complexion, by retiring from the scorching sun, to

his shaded hut: as soon might the leopard lose his spots, barely by plunging into the solitudes of the wilderness; when the flood could not wash them away.——— The waters of death are not waters of ablution, but rather do they give the colouring and complexion to our destiny. They are not a slow and oblivious stream; but rather a rushing torrent that bears us away, before we are aware. Death comes suddenly to all. It does break sooner or later into the midst of life. It comes at a time when we think not. It comes, not when all our plans are ready for it; not with harbingers and prophecies and preparations; not with a heart-thrilling message, saying, "set thy house in order; for this year thou shalt die;" no voice is in the infectious breath of the air that brings contagion and death with it; no coming step startles us when disease is approaching; no summoning hand knocks at the gate of life, when its last dread foe is about to enter its dark and guarded passages; no monitory conviction within, says, "this month—this week I shall die!" No, it comes at a time when we think not; it comes upon an unprepared hour, unless our life be preparation; it finds us with all our faults, with all our sins about us; it finds us, that which life has made us—finds us such as the very action, habit, and spirit of life, have made us—and bids us die, such as we lived!

Who of *you* will meet his end when he expects it? Perhaps not one. Or, if you should, how solemn a message would you address to the living! Who of us, has, in our own apprehension, been brought to such a crisis, but has had thoughts, which no language can utter, on this momentous concern? We felt that then was not the time to prepare. "Oh! not now—not

here!" is the language of the dying man, as with broken utterance, and the failing and faltering breath of life he testifies his last conviction, "not now—not here, is the place or the time, to prepare for death!" And he feels, too, that all which the world contains, vanishes into nothing, compared with this preparation! Are we, then, prepared?—not by a preternatural or extravagant state of feeling; not by glooms, nor by raptures; nor by any assurance, nor by any horror of mind; but by the habitual and calm discharge of our duty, by labours of kindness, by the spirit of devotion?—by a temper of mind, kindred to that heaven which we hope to enter? Are we thus ready, every day, every hour? On the exchange, in the office, in the study; in the house and by the way; in the work-shop, and in the field; are we ever ready? "Blessed are those servants, whom the Lord when he cometh shall find watching:—and if he shall come, in the second watch, or in the third watch, and find them so, Blessed are those servants."

DISCOURSE XIV.

ON DELAY IN RELIGION.

ACTS 24. 25. GO THY WAY FOR THIS TIME; WHEN I HAVE A CONVENIENT SEASON, I WILL CALL FOR THEE.

THUS answered Felix, when Paul "reasoned of righteousness,and temperance,and judgment to come." So impressive was the expostulation, that, as we are told, "Felix trembled:" and yet so strong was his love of indulgence and ease, that though shaken by the terrors of conscience, he could say, "go thy way for this time; when I have a convenient season, I will call for thee."

This, my friends, is not a solitary instance in the history of human conduct. Felix, the easy sensualist, the self-indulgent worldling, the negligent excuser of himself, has more followers, we must fear, than Paul, the fearless preacher. There are more to resist the voice of conscience, than to urge its reproof.

Yet there are times of admonition—even though the lips of every other teacher were silent—there are times of *God's* admonition, that come to all. The events of life, or the fears of death, sometimes arouse the most careless. The stern call of adversity compels attention; or the time of escape from danger, of relief from sickness, or of full and overflowing pros-

perity, touches with ingenuous feeling, the minds of the most thoughtless. There are seasons, too, of more than ordinary reflection. The conviction, sometimes comes with power,—we hardly know whence it comes —that our life is hasting away, and that but little time is left to fulfil its duties, and to secure its better hopes. Or, else, conscience,—like the preacher in our text—conscience comes forth from its prison of long confinement and silence, and reasons with the guilty heart of righteousness, and temperance, and judgment to come, till it trembles. Alas! that these eventful hours and moments, should glide away like other moments and hours of life, and be lost in the tide of common affairs and events! Yet it is even so. The greatest and most solemn feelings of the human heart, *may* pass away, and leave no deeper trace, than its most idle fancies. Felix trembled; and Agrippa afterwards said in the same judgment-hall, to the same preacher, "almost thou persuadest me to be a Christian;" and yet these declarations are not the record of the lives of these men, but the record of one awful moment. Again the world rushed in with its cares and pleasures; again indulgence pleaded and pride flattered; and the moment—the moment of promise, and of peril—was lost; lost, never to be recovered; never to be recalled perhaps, till the great judgment shall reveal its unspeakable solemnity and consequence.

And do you ask how it is that the most precious moments of our earthly existence are thus lost; how it is that the embryo purposes of duty are destroyed, how it is that what are seemingly the very epochs of our improvement—how it is that the fairest signals of hope, become the monuments of our shame and con-

demnation? I answer in the language of all experience, and of all Scripture,—the reason is to be found, in the plea of delay. It is not because any one *resolves* upon sinning, and suffering the penalty, but it is because every one is promising future amendment. It is not because the human heart *can* boldly and imperatively silence the "strong monitions" of conscience, but because it can evade them; because it can say, to each one of them successively, "go thy way for this time. Go thy way, not for ever;" that were too fearful to say; "not for ever; Oh no: I will call thee back again; when there is a convenient season, I will call for thee: but go thy way for this time."

Let us, then, endeavour to spread out a little this plea of delay, and consider in some particulars its nature.

In the path of transgression, the traveller is always in straits of difficulty, which urge him forward. His way on either side, is hedged up, and to his own apprehension, he is always put under the necessity of proceeding. Now this would render him extremely uneasy, and would be quite intolerable, indeed, if the case were never to be any better. But though he is rushing on in a narrow and headlong passage, he always descries a point before him, where to the eye of his imagination, the path becomes wider; some fair and tranquil spot, where he will have leisure to pause and consider. There is never—there never was—there never will be—a course of sinful indulgence, or of sinful neglect, but it has, and for ever will have, marked out somewhere in its progress, *the more convenient season.* There is always a period, but it is never present—there is always a period *coming*, when

temptation is to intermit its power; when the ever-besetting obstacles to present duty, are to be withdrawn. "It is true," (says the victim of procrastination,) "it is true, that religion is a thing which ought to be attended to, and must be: it is true, for instance, that this act of piety, or benevolence, ought to be performed, or that extravagance or indulgence ought to be laid aside, but a number of circumstances, he says, for the present render it particularly inconvenient. In a little time, things will change for the better; and *then*, the matter shall most assuredly be attended to."

Or else, some evil habit—this very procrastination indeed becomes a habit and one of the most fatal—but some habit of sensual vice, is stealing upon the man, who yet maintains an outward decency. And he intends to maintain it. No man in the world less intends to become the victim of violent passion, and vile profligacy. But now is not the convenient season to reform. When this time of trouble or of provocation has passed by, for which at present he says, "some solace is needed, or some indulgence is lawful, then the evil is to be manfully resisted." Or perhaps the subject of duty is viewed on a larger scale. There are many who feel that they ought to do much more to prepare for a future state, than they have been wont to do. They feel that they are not yet Christians: that religion is not with them the concern of chief interest; that prayer is not their pleasure; that God is not the supreme object of love, and fear, and obedience. Something is yet to be done. They are yet to pray, and to care for the soul. They do not intend to leave the world, in total neglect of the great and sublime purpose for which they were sent into it. They dare

not meet the God of life, and of judgment, thus. But for the present, the cares of this world, or the deceitfulness of riches, or the lusts of other things, choke the feeble purpose, and render it fruitless. The pleasures of youth, awhile plead for delay in religion; then the business of manhood takes up the excuse; and bequeaths it, in turn, to the infirmities of age. All circumstances admit the promise; none favour the performance of it. There is a time of leisure and tranquillity, for meditation and prayer; there is a convenient time; but it is for ever to come. In futurity with these persons—in futurity, not in present action—is all the hope of salvation. But futurity, is eternal. It can promise for ever, and never be required to perform.

Such is the plea of delay. Let us now proceed to consider, in the next place, how it ought to be regarded. And here let me observe, that I am not speaking in this discourse, merely to a class of persons, who in the language of our pulpit, are called sinners. I would speak to all, be they called sinners or Christians, who are conscious that they are delaying to do ANY thing, which they ought to do. And there are three characters under which, I think, this habit of mind will appear to you. The plea of delay is one fraught with *guilt*, *delusion*, and *danger*.

I. First, it is a plea fraught with guilt. It is an inexcusable plea. It is by the very acknowledgment of him who employs it—it is emphatically, pleading guilty. For it implies the knowledge of duty, and the deliberate purpose to violate it. It is not sinning through haste, ignorance, or mistake. It is not sinning, and afterwards confessing it; but it is a case, in which

confession goes before the act. It is not reasoning away the conviction of duty; but it is admitting and violating it, in the same moment. The language of the procrastinator is in terms like these; "I know that this is my duty,"—for if he does not admit the obligation in question, why does he excuse himself? why, not say at once, this is not my duty and I shall not perform it?—his language, then, is, "I know that this is my duty; I know that my Maker has commanded it; I know that his commands relate to the present moment, and to every moment of my existence; but yet"—but what?—we are ready to exclaim—does he in express terms refuse obedience? Does he absolutely say, "I *will* not perform it?" No; not absolutely, but he *virtually* says it in the plea of delay. He resolves to neglect the command of God, though he would not dare to utter the resolution. He resolves to neglect the command of God, though he would not dare with the slightest whisper, to breathe the resolution into the ear of his neighbour. But, remember, my friend, that the language which God regards, is not the language of the lips, but of the heart and the life. And if he who knew *not*, and *did* commit things worthy of punishment, shall suffer for it; what shall be the lot of him who knew his Lord's will, who confessed the duty he owed, and prepared not himself?

"Had I not come and spoken unto them," said our Saviour, "they had not had sin, but now they have no cloak for their sin." Had not Felix heard Paul, had he not been convinced of righteousness and judgment to come, he would have had less to answer for. But the plea of delay involves in it, the very sentence of

condemnation; a sentence, which he who uses it, in the very act, pronounces against himself.

II. The second characteristic of the plea of delay is its *delusiveness.*

It would be too much, perhaps, to say that it is absolutely insincere. None, probably, use it with the secret understanding that it is an artifice. Men, it is rather to be supposed, are its honest dupes. They sincerely imagine, that the time of promised amendment will come.

Now, herein, consists the delusion; not only that it is utterly improbable that the time ever will come; but that it is rendered more improbable, by this very promise, that it shall come. This very expectation of being religious by and bye, is, in fact, the greatest possible occasion for despondency. And so long as it is promised and resolved upon, the thing itself, of course, can never take place. The spirit of the promise, so long as it exists, forbids the very hope of amendment.

For thus I reason. Why cannot the wicked man turn from his wicked way, *now?* Why cannot the vicious man dash from his lips the deadly cup, *this moment?* Why cannot the profane man cease to violate the sacred name of his Maker, from henceforth? Why cannot the man who is delaying the great duty and interest of life, begin a course of religious virtue and piety, this very day, this very hour? Is it because his habits, his passions, his desires, are adverse? Without doubt this is the reason. Now in the name of all that is true and rational, let it be asked—are these evil habits, and passions, and desires, to become more favourable to virtue and purity, by *indulgence*? Is the veteran sinner more likely to turn than the stripling

in vice? Is an aversion to religion, or to any part of it, to prayer, to watchfulness, to strict virtue, is such an aversion to be conciliated, by being indulged and made habitual? Will you *pamper* the passions into self-denial? Will you exasperate an evil temper into gentleness and kindness? Will you throw up the reins to sin, under a notion that you may, by and bye, more easily restrain it?

Now mark the complicated delusion. It is difficult to reform a wrong habit or to establish a right one, at present, and therefore it is deferred; deferred, let it be remembered, precisely because it is difficult. Delay, at every moment, increases the difficulty. Meanwhile, the mind reposes with self-complacency, on its specious purposes; and, at last, it is probable, to complete the deception, pleads, in extenuation of its sins, the very purposes, which it has violated.

There is a strange fatality attending all moral delinquency, all irreligion, in every form of it. To the transgressor things never—no, they never appear as they are. In the course of sin, or of sinful neglect, for instance, every human being believes, himself to be an exception from all others. "I know indeed," says the anxious delayer of his duty, "that the time for amendment has never come to thousands who expected it as I do: but mine is to be a different lot. There are many days yet before me, and I intend, I am resolved, one day, to pursue a different course. I do not intend to die as I live." Thus he is led on by the illusions of hope till he is beyond the reach of this world's great probation. Millions have walked in that way to the regions of moral perdition, yet he is persuaded there is something in his case, to distinguish it from them all.

And every one of those millions, he knows, entertained the same persuasion; but their failure does not shake his confidence.

Of this miserable delusion the case related in our text, with the circumstances, furnishes a striking example. Felix heard the voice of truth and was troubled. Conscience spoke within him and would not be utterly silenced. He felt—O how solemn with a man is the visitation and the hour of conscience! he felt that the call must be answered. He felt that he must do something. And how does he meet this necessity—this great, this self-enforced necessity? What answer does he return to the message? Alas! he dismisses it with a *promise!* He says to him who brought it, "go thy way, for this time!" The preacher retired. Why, you are ready to ask, did not the very sound of his departing steps carry alarm to the breast of this anxious inquirer? Ah! it was that delusive promise, "when I have a convenient season I will call for thee." With this he regained his peace of mind, and life passed on as before. In pride, in pleasure, in popular favour, Felix forgot the lonely captive. Day succeeded to day, and month, to month; but we hear no more of the fatal promise. But what do we hear? Why, that this same man, this Felix, two years after, "to do the Jews a pleasure," contrary to what he knew to be the dictates of justice and humanity, "left the preacher bound in prison." Thus ended the promise of Felix; and thus, with scarcely an exception, end all pleas of delay in religion.

But do they result in simple mistake? Is it the worst of the case that the delaying sinner deceives himself? No, my friends, delusion in matters of duty

is something worse than mistake—it is injury of the most alarming kind.

III. This leads me to the third remark; viz. that the plea of delay is dangerous. Its danger has already in part appeared, but it claims farther attention.

It ought to be considered, not only that the habit of procrastination is nothing else but a habit of deceiving ourselves, but that it is above all others fatal. It were bad enough to postpone our duty, and withal to delude ourselves; but to be morally deceived in being deluded, to make the fair promise of better things the very lure to perdition, to make ourselves the more easy, when we are doing the more wrong—to muffle, and to keep out of sight, the deadly weapon, only that it may strike a more secret and a more fatal blow; there is something in this that is well fitted to shock and alarm us. Yet this is the simple statement of what is true in the case of every man, who delays to do what he knows that he ought to do. The direct way to make the inclination to sinful indulgence ruinous, is to flatter ourselves with the promise of amendment. There is nothing—for I must repeat and insist upon this observation—there is nothing so completely fatal to every reasonable prospect of being religious, as this promise to be religious at some future time. If it were not for this there might be some hope.

But this promise of amendment is specious. It seems to take off the boldness and impiety of transgression.

This paltering with conscience, amuses and stupifies it at the same time. It were infinitely better to say—for bold and impious as it may seem, it would be saying the truth—"I *do* not obey the commands of God,

and I shall not: I *am* not a Christian, and I do not expect to be one; I have no reason to think that my feelings or habits are to be changed, by being cherished; I shall probably—without an immediate endeavour to amend—shall probably be, ten or twenty years hence, only more decidedly and habitually what I am now; I shall almost certainly die, as I am now living." This, my friends, is the plain and sober truth; and if the conscience could awake to its full, and its fearful import, it would not be easily lulled again into the sleep of death.

Withal, and to complete the danger of delay, the work of evil habits is imperceptible and speedy. There is blindness in the way, and it is ever terminated by a fearful precipice.

The progress of gross vice, and its end, are an illustration of the progress of *all* sin. The man who is plunging into vicious habits, will admit to you, perhaps, that the consequences, if he goes on, are tremendous. Consequences? Let them be tremendous. What is that to him? What has he to do with consequences? He does not mean to reach them. He has no intention of proceeding so far. A little indulgence can do him no harm, and it is a very different thing—is it not?—a very different thing, from being grossly sottish and vile. That he is determined he never will be. He cannot resolve to leave off, just now; and he cannot see that it is at all necessary. He surely has the power of free choice, and he can stop when he pleases. Perhaps he is resolved that he will do so, after he has proceeded to a certain extent. He is not so blind, as his friends think he is, and as some good people and some worthy preachers would represent. He knows

all that you can tell him. He claims one distinction, at least among the vicious. He is not a fool. He is not without his thoughts.

Thus he reasons. And while he reasons, habit strengthens; and ruin overtakes him before he is aware. His reputation is suddenly gone; disease has secretly sapped the foundations of his firmness and strength; and death surprises him with its ghastly visage, before he is aware that he is *declining* from the path of health, and enjoyment, and life. "He that being often reproved hardeneth his neck, shall suddenly be destroyed and that without remedy!"

Besides, if the plea of delay were not thus hazardous; if it did not appear as if invented on purpose to insure the ruin of its victim; if it were ever so promising; if the work of evil habits were not so imperceptible and speedy; still there is the danger of a total uncertainty about the continuance of life. If you *should* appoint a time, when you are to commence that better life of piety and prayer, of which you are thinking, that time may be too late. The expected day will come, indeed; but it may shine upon your grave. For what is your life? It is a vapour, that appeareth for a little time, and then vanisheth away. I have seen it rise; the beam of morning kindled it; but the beam that kindled, dissolved, and dissipated it for ever! Such is life. It appeareth for a little time; and the only certainty about the length of its actual continuance, is, that it is totally uncertain. To-morrow's sun may melt it away. A breath of wind may scatter it. The touch of death may at any moment dissolve it. At any moment, this phantom life may

disappear; and eternity break in upon the delusive dream of promised amendment.

And is this brief and hasty hour of our being, the season for delay? Do we employ ourselves in delays, when we have hardly time to act? Do the already frail and dying, *delay* their preparation for sickness and death? If some thousands of years were allotted to us on earth, there might be a show of reason—and yet if what we have said be true, *only* a *show* of reason, in deferring. But what shall we think of it, when the time is all too short for resolution and for action?

And yet, perhaps, with some of us, the period of life that is past, has been up to this time, a period of delay. We have, many of us, not been more religious and devout, more correct and virtuous, more humble, kind and forbearing, more faithful and blameless in all the commandments and ordinances of the Lord, not because we never intend to be so, but because we are delaying to be so. We are still saying to conscience, and to the command of God, and to all the kind and all the awful messages of Providence, "go thy way for this time."

When shall this inexpressible—I had almost said, this insufferable folly of indecision, be given up? When will men cease to seal their destruction, under the promise of escaping it? There *are* but two states of mind on this subject, that can, for an instant, stand the test of reason—either to resolve never to lead a life of piety and virtue, or to begin that life this very day. Any other course is such manifest infatuation as cannot, in reason, be entertained for a moment. And dreadful as the alternative to the right choice, is, I would press every mind to it, I would throw every

thing upon that cast, rather than leave the issue to that fatal indecision which will not even lift its hand to choose. I adjure you, tell us not any longer, of a more convenient season. I put this matter to your reason. I will use no tender exhortation, no soft entreaty now, though our blessed religion is full of such. I put this matter to stern and solemn reason: and I say—resolve to begin the religious life now,—or take the uttermost hazard of perdition!

DISCOURSE XV.

ARGUMENTS FOR RENEWED DILIGENCE IN RELIGION.

(Preached on the last Sabbath of the year.)

ROMANS 13. 11. AND THAT, KNOWING THE TIME, THAT NOW IT IS HIGH TIME TO AWAKE OUT OF SLEEP.

SIN is here compared to a sleep. It is the sleep of the soul; the sleep not of the senses, for they are often in these circumstances intensely alive and awake to their objects—but the sleep of the soul. It is the insensibility, the lethargy, the death-like stupor of the higher, the moral, the immortal nature. In this sleep of the soul, there is the same insensibility to spiritual things, as in natural sleep, there is to natural things. To the *natural* sleeper—all the objects around him, be they ever so interesting and splendid and wonderful, all that would otherwise occupy his hands, or engage his thoughts, or delight his vision, all the voices of active and stirring life around him, all the ministrations of nature, all the magnificence of heaven,—to him are no more than if they were blotted out of existence. He sees not, he hears not, he feels nothing, he pursues nothing; he has no desires, nor fears, nor hopes; though the crowded world of objects and interests and changes and operations, is all about him, and heaven,

thronged with all its glorious spheres, is stretched over him, yet they are no more to him, than, to the insensible clod.———So it is with the moral sleeper. There *is* a world of moral realities, interesting, glorious and wonderful; there is a world of spiritual visions and voices, all around him; but to his ear, and his eye, and his heart, and his consciousness, they are nothing. Though these realities of spiritual life and beauty, these glories of the spiritual nature and of the everlasting gospel, are fairer and richer than all the treasures of earth, and brighter than all the splendors of heaven, yet he sees not this, and he believes it not.

Are not *many* thus asleep? Are they not all around us, reposing in bowers of worldly ease, stretched on couches of worldly indulgence, lulled by the viol of pleasure, fanned by breezes of prosperity, bewildered by phantoms of ambition—or darkly and blindly struggling with evils, with trials, and with sorrows—yet all sunk more or less deeply in this deathlike slumber of the soul? Let us pursue the inquiry and the comparison.

The moral, like the natural sleeper, has dreams. And he dreams of realities. Yes, the great realities—heaven and hell, the soul's worth, and treasure, and destiny, and danger,—to many a man are nothing but dreams. They pass before him, like the visions of the night; but they engage no waking energy, nor earnest or constant pursuit. The vision of religious truths and objects, is sometimes, perhaps, awful and alarming; but still though disturbed and partially awakened, he is asleep; his mind is aroused only to momentary consciousness; only enough aroused to say, and to feel relieved by saying, "it is a dream." He is glad

that the impression does not last with him. He shakes from him the transient sense of these realities, as if they were the merest delusions. Yes, to the moral sleeper, the connection of the future with the present, the tissue of these daily thoughts and feelings that is binding him to future welfare or woe, the web of destiny, is but "such stuff as dreams are made of."

The moral sleeper, too, like the natural, is not only disturbed, or perchance delighted, with the visions of his sleep; but he is sometimes more fully awakened. The strong hand of affliction is laid upon him, or the rough hand of danger shakes him from his deep slumbers; or his fellow-sleeper, perhaps, begins to awake and to arouse himself; and he is partially awakened: but he dislikes the interruption, he is angry and peevish at the disturbance; or he feebly promises, saying,—in the words, which an ancient prophet, as if he were, indeed, a prophet for all future time, hath put into the mouth of just such a sleeper—saying, "a *little* more sleep, a *little* more slumber; I will awake soon;" and then he sinks into a still deeper repose, from which, it may be, nothing but the shock of death will ever arouse him!

For, *is* not the sleep of sin—notwithstanding these interruptions and these dreams—*is* not the sleep of sin still heavy upon him, who is, after all, insensible to truth, insensible to spiritual objects and affections, insensible to sin itself? There is that in every man's heart, which should make him sigh, and weep, and tremble; and is he not morally asleep if he is insensible to it?—if he does not arouse himself to contend against his spiritual foes, to watch over his moral maladies, to keep his too much and too long neglected

heart with all diligence? There is that, also, within every man, which should make him rejoice and glory; the power and privilege which God gives him of recovery to virtue and piety and heaven, the traces of a divine original, the spark, which kindled, may glow and brighten for ever; yes, it is that which should make him rejoice and hope and aspire, which should bow him to awe, and melt him to thanksgiving, which should make him feel, that he has within him, a trust and a treasure, more honourable and precious than all the goods and distinctions of the world. And if he is insensible to all this, if he does nothing for his inward welfare, if he does not watch nor strive, if he does not even fear nor pray; is he not in regard to that precious, that better nature, asleep? Does not the soul sleep, when its truest and noblest interests, are the interests most of all left out of sight and neglected? Is not the eye of the soul closed, and its ear heavy with slumber, when it sees and hears nothing of all that, which should most of all arouse and awe and gladden and transport it?

Perhaps, some may think, that the picture is overdrawn. And for the spiritual condition of many, we may hope, that it is. And we do not say, you will observe, that in *any* the sleep is profound and undisturbed. But nevertheless how deep it is we may not properly apprehend, because we do not consider what it is to be properly awake to the soul.

What is it to be awake to the soul?———Let us see what it is to be awake in *worldly* things. How clear is the vision of men when directed to their outward interests! How keenly do they discriminate, how accurately do they judge, how eagerly do they

pursue! It needs no Sabbaths, no set times, to meditate on stocks, and bargains, and speculations. It needs no sermons to remind men of these things. Every sense, and member, and faculty is awake, and alive, and intensely employed, in the earnest toil and competition of life. Here are no faint impressions, no dim peceptions, no doubts, no objections, no evasions. To the worldly, it may be said—to those of the worldly who now hear me, I may say—you are all inquiring how you shall do more, and gain more; not excusing yourselves, and striving to do the least that will satisfy your own minds; not excusing yourselves, and putting off business, as you put off duty, upon your neighbour; and saying it may be proper for this, and that, and the other man, to go forward, and do business, and get gain. No, you grasp at the bare chance of worldly profit. You step manfully forward, not waiting for others, not walking timidly and doubtfully, and straining your eyes, to detect, on every side, shapes of evil and danger, as men who are half asleep. No; you are not irresolute, nor doubtful, nor cowardly about these things. You have no fear of pledges and promises, and forms of promise in business; no fear of bonds, and notes, and covenants, in transactions where the whole heart is interested. Many have not half enough fear of these things.

But, alas! how different from all this wakeful zeal and activity, and readiness, and forwardness, and courage, and manly decision, is the ordinary pursuit of religious things! Here, alas! men have doubts. They do not see things clearly. They are afraid of some evil lying in wait. They are afraid of forms

and covenants, and sacramental vows. They doubt about prayer. They doubt about public worship. They question whether they shall not get just as much good at home. Above all, they doubt about religious undertakings, and efforts, and charities. It is quite a matter of speculation, they think, whether any good will be done. The case is completely reversed, from what it is in worldly things. A speculation, there, is a grand chance for the acquisition of goods. But in religious things, the noblest chance for infinite good to ourselves and others, is but a doubtful speculation. If there is adventure, or experiment, or speculation here, a thousand voices are raised against it; while the whole business of life is more or less a *business* of adventure and risk. If it is proposed to send the Gospel to China, or Hindoostan; why it is a great way off, and the people are a strange people, and the success is doubtful: but there is no difficulty in fitting out ships to send merchandise to China, or Hindoostan. If it is proposed to form an association to relieve and instruct the poor at home, the subject is environed with difficulties and doubts; but a company for speculation in golden mines or golden visions, can be formed without difficulty—and without prudence.

"They that sleep" says the apostle—speaking literally—"sleep in the night." And is there not a *spiritual* night, brooding over the minds of thousands? There is nothing in the world so glorious as the perfection of God; there is nothing so near as his presence. And yet how many habitually walk in the sense and presence of every thing, but the ever manifested and omnipresent Divinity! Eyes have they,

but they see not, and ears have they, but they hear not. They see all objects, but see them not as the tokens of his power. They hear, but they hear not the voice of God. They hear every thing, but those calls that are made upon the soul; the calls of blessing, and trial, and temptation, and warning, and encouragement, that are all around them. They mark every thing in the paths of life, but those directions, and commands, and exhortations, that constantly address themselves to the spiritual nature. They see not, at every step, duties, mercies, privileges, means of virtuous improvement, opportunities of usefulness, cares of the soul to be taken, cares of other men's good, and true welfare, dangers admonishing them, blessed hopes beckoning them onward, heaven opening to them. They do not walk in the abiding and the living sense of these things.

This it would be, in some measure, to be awake to the soul. But what it would be altogether, our perceptions of the soul and its interests, are, perhaps, too dull for us to tell, or to comprehend. Well may we suspect that our standard of religious wakefulness and diligence is far too low. Well may we suspect that we do not yet know what it is to be awake to all the glorious and affecting concerns of our moral and immortal welfare; and that if we were thus once awakened, every thing in this world would appear in a new light; we should see with new eyes, we should apprehend with new senses, we should be aroused to an impression more profound and overwhelming than ever this outward world has made upon us. If, indeed, we can so strongly grasp this world; if we can so strongly apprehend, and so eagerly pursue the mere forms of

things, the vanities that perish in the using, the trifles of a day; with what ardour and intensity would the soul put forth its powers, when it once laid hold on realities! If the charms of pleasure can so fascinate men, how would the beauties of virtue enrapture them! If glittering gold can so dazzle them, how would they gaze, if they saw them, upon the riches of holy truth, and life, and immortality! If the most ordinary good news can so delight them, what would the Gospel do! If earth can win and bind all their warm affections and sympathies, how would heaven bear away their thoughts to more delightful meditations, to more holy friendships, to more blessed hopes, to more ineffable visions of beauty and beatitude, than all that this world ever unfolded, or offered, to its most ardent votaries! Then would worldly desire, and love, and zeal be more than transformed; they would be regenerated to new life and power. He, upon whom this happy renewal of the soul should pass, would find that nobler energies had slept within him, than he had before imagined, to be a part of himself. He would come to feel that he had undervalued the gift of being. He would thank God as he never before thanked him, for the blessing of existence, and the promise of immortality.

But I must check myself in the course of these reflections, to consider how urgent is the call for this awakening from the sleep of spiritual negligence, and stupidity, and death.

"Knowing the time, says the apostle, that it is now high time to awake out of sleep."

In the first place, then, if we intend ever to do more for our spiritual welfare, it is time that we were doing

it; it is *now* time, that we were doing it; and it may be the only time. If we entertain the purpose of being more diligent in devotion, private, or public; of keeping a stricter watch over our consciences; of more effectually controlling sinful passions, and correcting sinful habits; of taking a more decided stand in conversation, and avowal, and practice, as Christians; it is high time that the purpose was accomplished, and the work done. If we ever make amends for wrong, or recompense for injury, or restitution of dishonest gains; or would tender forgiveness to our enemy, or heal the breaches of confidence, or the wounds that unkindness has given; or would comfort the distressed and suffering, or would send alms to the destitute, to kindle the fire on the cold hearth, or to spread with our abundance the table of penury; if we would do any thing of this, or aught else, that our conscience dictates, or our hand finds to do, let us remember that there is no time to be lost, and that what we do, we must do quickly.

In the next place, it is time, and it is high time that we do our duty, whatever it is, inasmuch as it is a matter of the most pressing concern. Our soul's welfare is to be secured, and it brooks not delay. The very errand of life is to be done, and it must not be put off. Happiness and misery, heaven and hell, wait upon our decision; and, happiness and misery, heaven and hell, are not things to be trifled with! The messengers of Providence are around us; blessings, afflictions, dangers, invite, admonish, threaten us; God calls, good men entreat, Jesus hath lifted up to all ages the cry of wisdom, and warning, and agony; and these are arguments and appeals that endure not re-

sistance, nor insensibility. Every thing is at stake; the trial of the soul is passing; diligence only can safely abide it: watchfulness only can bring it to a happy issue; and we must not sleep in fatal security!

This is no merely solemn, and at the same time, unmeaning language. It is a serious, unutterable reality. Look within, and see, if a trial is not there actually and hourly passing, between the right and the wrong, between the happy affections and the miserable, between the spiritual and the sensual, the heavenly and the worldly. What consequences are depending, future years, future ages, death, judgment, eternity, only can tell. Oh! that some other language than mortals use, for mortal purposes, might aid us to speak forth the might, the magnificence, the immensity of these themes! "Awake"—it is reason that calls, it is the better nature that pleads, it is a voice, as awful as the trump of the angel of judgment, that cries—"awake, O thou that sleepest, and arise from the dead!"

It is high time, in the third place, because too much time is already lost. With some, twenty years; with some, thirty, with some, forty, fifty years, have past; and they have done nothing effectually for the soul's welfare. So many years of promises and excuses, and evasions, but not one year, not one month of habitual prayers, and daily resistance of evil, and wakeful discharge of the great spiritual trust! They were lengthened out for this very end; and this, amidst all the activity of life, has been the only object habitually neglected. How blessed would have been the remembrance of these years, if they had all been devoted to virtue, to purity, and heaven; if their

whole course had been a course of kind words, and good deeds, and holy prayers; if their brightening progress had gladdened the sorrowful, and inspired the languid in virtue, and led and helped on "the sacramental part of God's elect;" if every step of them had brought the pilgrim of virtue and faith, nearer to the company of the faithful and blessed in heaven! The toil, and business, and pleasure of life need not have paused; but that toil, and business, and pleasure might have been consecrated and blessed by a heavenly aim.

Can any being, claiming the attributes of reason, say, that, compared with this, the case of spiritual indifference and sloth is not gloomy? What should we think, if twenty years of our life, had been passed in blank and barren idiocy? And when we awaked from that stupor and sleep of the soul, how should we regard the time that had thus passed? But compared with twenty years of growing irreligion and vice, that lot would be a blessing. In that case, no blame could attach, and no reproach would follow, and no retribution would call the unhappy victim to its bar. Twenty years of sickness would be accounted a sad lot; and yet that might have saved the soul for ever. But twenty years of spiritual maladies, to which no healing nor help has come; twenty, thirty, forty years, in which a man has grown no better,—a common case, I most seriously fear—in which no holy principles of action have been gained, no passions subdued, no communion with God has been sought, no preparation for trouble and sickness and death has been made, no meetness for heaven has been acquired!—truly, well might the Apostle say to his converts, "let the time

past *suffice*, wherein ye have wrought the will of the Gentiles." Is it not—O negligent man! O sinful sleeper!—is it not enough? Canst thou ask more time, to be thus wasted and lost? If thou canst, when will thy wakening be? When,—and where? If thou wilt not arise now from this spiritual lethargy, thy wakening may be, when to all human view it is too late; and where the last failing voices of mercy may arouse you only to horror and despair!

When and where, I say not; but this I know, that every hour of this awful repose is an hour of added peril. It is high time to awake from this sleep, in the fourth place, because there is infinite danger in it. Sleep, if thou wilt, on the brink of a precipice; sleep on the mountain's brow, with a yawning chasm beneath you; sleep, on the sea-shore, when the roaring tide is coming in with a flood to overwhelm you; but let no man sleep amidst the mountain precipices and chasms of this world's temptations; let no man sleep amidst the whelming tides of passion. Those outward dangers are but symbols of a danger internal, spiritual, and great, beyond the power of any comparison to set forth. If you saw a fellow-being in *those* perilous situations, you would fly to his rescue; or you would be struck with horror at the danger which you could not avert. But, if you are a negligent transgressor of God's commands, a careless offender against your own conscience, an easy yielder to sinful indulgence, you have infinitely more reason to tremble for *yourself*. Ruin is not more certainly in the path of the devouring sea, than it is in the path and course of unholy passions and sinful indulgences.

And what a ruin is it?—not of the body but of the

soul; not of merchandise, but of virtue; not of gold and silver, but of those affections, which rightly regulated, are richer—sacred heaven! how poorly was I about to speak!—richer than gold and silver, was I ready to say?—nay, richer than all the suns and stars of the firmament. What a ruin is that which is found in the brand that sinful gratifications leave on the soul; in the blight and curse of an envious mind; in the seared and callous heart of avarice; in the meanness of selfish competitions; in the baseness of living on the world's favour; in the barrenness of an unsatisfied and desolated mind; in the darkness of a soul estranged and alienated from its Maker! We talk of ruin; but there is no ruin like that: no desolation like that which enters into the chambers of the soul; no ruin like that which lays waste the spiritual temple; no scourge like that which passes over the immortal nature. All misery, but that which sin causes, is in its nature, occasional, temporary, transient; it does not belong to the mind, but only to its condition. But that misery which sin creates becomes a part of the soul; it will cling to the mind, till the last trace of evil habit, is worn away by repentance.

It is high time to awake, then, because now is the only time we may have for it; because a matter of infinite weight presses; because, too much time has been lost; and because every added moment of spiritual sloth is a moment of added peril.

Once more, let us be admonished that it is high time to awake, by the tokens of the closing year. The season which we are approaching, is a time of congratulations and kind tokens of remembrance;

and be it so. But let the great admonition of the season sink deeper into our minds, than congratulations, and become an abiding memorial within us, more precious than all the offerings of friendship. Let the compliments of the season be paid, and let them pass, as they will pass; but so let not the solemn mementos of the coming season pass away from us. These years, Christian brethren, are hurrying us away. I say not this gloomily, nor to communicate gloom, but to awaken from indifference, and arouse to exertion. What shall startle us from our sloth and negligence, if these epochs of our hasting life shall not? Most of us, it may be, imagine that a time will come when we shall be more zealous, and earnest, and decided. But when shall it once be? and what shall awaken us to it, if not the remembrance of lost time, and the present and urgent tokens of its hasty flight? Well saith the poet,

"It is the signal that demands despatch;
How much is to be done! My hopes and fears
Start up alarmed; and o'er life's narrow verge,
Look down—on what? A fathomless abyss,
A dread eternity, how surely mine!"

"Seize, then, the present moments;
For be assured, they all are messengers;
And though their flight be silent, and their paths trackless
As the winged couriers of the air,
They post to heaven, and there record thy folly.
Because, though stationed on the important watch,
Thou like a sleeping, faithless sentinel,
Did'st let them pass, unnoticed, unimproved.
And know, for that thou slumberest on the guard,
Thou shalt be made to answer at the bar,
For every fugitive.

Then stay the present instant, - - - - -
Imprint the mark of wisdom on its wings.
Oh! let it not elude thy grasp, but like
The good old patriarch upon record,
Hold the fleet angel fast, until he bless thee."

DISCOURSE XVI.

COMPASSION FOR THE SINFUL.

MARK 3. 5. AND WHEN HE HAD LOOKED ROUND ABOUT HIM WITH ANGER, BEING GRIEVED FOR THE HARDNESS OF THEIR HEARTS, HE SAID UNTO THE MAN, STRETCH FORTH THY HAND.

THAT part of this passage, only, which relates to the moral temper of our Saviour, is proposed for your present meditations. It is, in other words, and especially, the compassion of Jesus.

In reading the first clause of the sentence—he "looked round about him with anger"—I suppose that many may have felt an emotion, a thrill almost, of pain and doubt; they have felt that these words, by themselves, and in their simple meaning, were in painful contrast with all their ideas of our Saviour's meekness and patience; they have been ready to doubt whether the words *could* have been correctly translated. But how entirely and delightfully is the mind relieved by the words that follow—"being grieved for the hardness of their hearts!" He was indignant as he looked around him, and witnessed the bitter enmity and the base hypocrisy of the Jews; but his indignation instantly softened into pity; he was grieved at the hardness of their hearts.

This is one instance of that sublime moral harmony, that union in which the most opposite qualities met and mingled, that so entirely singles out from all other models, the character of our heavenly Teacher and Master. We recognise the same spirit with that which was so pathetically manifested, in his appeal to Jerusalem. "O Jerusalem! Jerusalem!—thou that killest the prophets and stonest them that are sent to thee,"—here is the tone of indignation and reproach; but mark, how instantly it is redeemed from the ordinary character of those sentiments—"thou that killest the prophets and stonest them that are sent unto thee; how often would I have gathered thy children even as a hen gathereth her brood under her wing, but ye would not!"

The spirit with which we should regard the faults and sins of mankind is nearly a neglected subject in morals; and it had been well for moral reformers and preachers of righteousness, if they had more thoroughly considered it. It is moreover, a very practical subject to all men. For we are constantly brought into contact with the faults and transgressions of mankind; every day offers, from this cause, some annoyance to our feelings, or some injury to our interests; every newspaper, that is taken in our hand, is burthened with the recital of crimes—robberies, murders, piracies, wars. Indeed, this constant experience of injustice or exasperation in some or other of their forms, and this extensive observation of human wickedness, are a part of our moral discipline; and it becomes us, to consider how we should meet it, and be made better by other men's faults. It is, indeed, in its mildest form, a sad

and grievous discipline, from which, no one should be willing to come out, unprofited.

There is another general observation applicable to this subject. As we advance in our moral discriminations, we shall always find that things before indifferent, become interesting; and things distant, it may be added, become near. A war, for instance, breaks out between distant nations. A man may say—what is that to me? What is the case of the French and the Austrians, of the Russians and the Poles, to me? I answer, it is much to you. For every time you read an account of a battle; every time you read of the prowess of armies, of blood and carnage, of blazing battlements and groaning hospitals, you have certain feelings; and they are marked with a strong moral complexion. You are pleased or pained; you exult or you regret; or you are indifferent; and to any refined moral sensibility, these states of mind will not be unimportant. Or, an extensive fraud in some public institution, although it may not touch you in your interests, does touch you in your feelings; and therefore, does concern, though not your pecuniary, yet, your moral welfare. And while others think that they have nothing to do but with words, nothing to do but to talk, and speculate, and wonder, and rail; a thoughtful man will feel that he has much to do with his own heart. Or, when the poor miserable victim of vice, the shattered wreck of a man, appears before the public eye, he may be contemplated with laughter or scorn; but from a man, who breathes the spirit of the Christian Master, that spectacle will draw forth deeper sentiments. It is the form of sacred humanity that is before him; it is an erring fellow-being; it is a deso-

late, forlorn, forsaken soul; and the thoughts of good men, that gather around that poor wretch, will be far deeper than those of indifference or scorn. And in fine, all human offences,—that whole system of dishonesty, evasion, circumventing, forbidden indulgence and intriguing ambition, in which men are struggling together, will often be looked upon, by a thoughtful observer, not merely as the sphere of mean toils and strifes, but as the mighty and, to a Christian eye, the solemn conflict of minds immortal, for ends vast and momentous as their own being. Sad and unworthy strife indeed! and let it be viewed with indignation; but let that indignation too, melt into pity.

Such, indeed, is the spirit recommended in our text —a spirit of indignation at human faults and follies, but a spirit too, which leans to pity; a feeling which although it begins often with indignation, always, by the aids of reflection and piety, *ends* in pity.

There *is* a portion of indignation in the right temper. The right feeling is not a good natured easiness at the transgressions of men, nor a worldly indifference, nor a falsely philosophic coldness, that puts on an air of reasoning and says, "it must be so," and "men were made so," and "this is what we must expect." Neither is it a worldly laxity of conscience, that accounts every thing well, that passes under the seal of public opinion. It is a decided and strong moral feeling, that ought to be awakened by human wickedness. It is indignation.

But, then, it is not a harsh and cruel feeling. It is not peevishness nor irritation. It is not hasty nor angry reproach. It is not a feeling that delights in denunciation. No; but the words of warning fall, as

they did from the lips of Jesus, mingled with lamentation. Or, the words of reproach are uttered as they were by Paul, when he told the Philippians, and told them *even weeping*, that some among them, were enemies of the cross of Christ.

There are other mistakes which we are liable to commit, and other wrong feelings, which we are prone to cherish, towards the erring and guilty.

Good men—shall I say it?—are too proud of their goodness. Here are you, a respectable individual in society. Dishonour comes not near you. Your countenance has weight and influence. Your robe is unstained. The poisonous breath of calumny has never been breathed upon your fair name. Ah! how easy is it to look down with scorn upon the poor, degraded offender; to pass by him with a lofty step; to draw up the folds of your garment around you, that it may not be soiled by his touch! Yet the great Master of virtue did not so: but he descended to familiar intercourse with publicans and sinners.

There is a feeling, I say, not only of scorn, but of triumph, often springing up from the survey of other men's faults. Many seem to think themselves better, for all the sins they can detect in others. And when they are going over with the catalogue of their neighbour's unhappy derelictions of temper, or conduct, there is often, amidst much apparent concern, a secret exultation, that poisons and blasts all their pretensions to wisdom and moderation, and their claims even to virtue itself. Nay, this feeling goes so far, that men take actual pleasure in the sins of others. It is not the corrupt man, only; it is not the seducer into the path of evil only, that does this; but it is every

man, whose thoughts are often employed in agreeable comparisons of his virtues, with the faults of his neighbour.

The power over men's faults, which is lost by a harsh or haughty treatment of them, would of itself, form a great subject; and one that much needs to be commended to all those who would exert any moral influence over their fellow-beings. The power of gentleness, the subduing influence of pity, the might of love, the control of mildness over passion, the commanding majesty of that perfect character which mingles grave displeasure with grief and pity for the offender—these things have been too little seen in the world. I believe that our pulpits, and our tribunals of justice, and parental authority among us, must put on a new aspect, before they will appear in all their dignity, their venerableness, their power, and beauty. We scarcely know, as yet, what we might do with men's passions and vices. They are commonly reputed, and some of them in particular, to be untameable, incorrigible, and fated to procure the ruin of their victims; and they are in part made so, by our wrong treatment of them. The human heart cannot yield to such an influence as we too often endeavour to exert upon it. It was not made to bow willingly to what is merely human; at least, not to what is *infirm* and *wrong* in human nature. If it yields to us, it must yield to what is divine in us. The wickedness of my neighbour cannot submit to my wickedness; his sensuality, for instance, cannot submit to my anger against his vices. My faults are not the instruments that are to correct his faults. And it is hence, that impatient reformers, and denouncing

preachers, and hasty reprovers, and angry parents, and irritable relatives, so often fail in their several departments, to reclaim the erring.

I would, therefore, remind them that they have a new lesson to learn, from the compassion of Jesus; and that is, while they permit in themselves the liveliest sensibility to the sins of men, to mingle with it the deepest commiseration for them.

I. And they may learn this lesson—they may find it enforced rather, first, by considering what it is, that their feelings and thoughts are exercised about.

It is sin. It is combined guilt and misery. It is the supreme evil. Whence shall we gather comparisons to set it forth? Shall we name sickness?—Sickness belongs to the body; the corruptible and perishable body. Pain?—physical pain? The body is its instrument, and end. Loss, disappointment? They are worldly accidents? Dishonour? It is, comparatively a shade upon a name. But a moral offence possesses all these characters, and it attaches them all to the soul. It is sickness; it is pain; it is loss; it is dishonour, in the immortal part. It is guilt; and it is misery added to guilt. It is calamity in itself: and it brings upon itself in addition the calamity of God's displeasure, and the abhorrence of all righteous beings, and the soul's own abhorrence. If you have to deal with this evil, deal faithfully, but patiently, and tenderly with it. This is no matter for petty provocation, nor for personal strife, nor for selfish irritation.

Speak kindly to your erring brother. God pities him; Christ has died for him; Providence waits for him; the mercy of heaven yearns towards him; and the spirits of heaven are ready to welcome him back

with joy. Let your voice be in unison with all those powers that God is using for his recovery.

Parent! speak gently to your offending child. This trait of parental duty should be deeply pondered. A tone of grave rebuke should, indeed, be sometimes used: perhaps, occasion may require that it should be often used; but the tone of peevish complaint and anger, never. There is a different language; and how much more powerful! "Ah! my child!" might one say, in the manner, if not in language—"my child! what injury is all this doing you?—this passion, this violence, or this vice, what a bitter cup is it preparing for you!" This language, this tone from the grave wisdom of a father, or the tender anxiety of a mother, might have saved some whom peevishness and provocation have driven farther and deeper into the ways of transgression.

But let us put the strongest case. Your neighbour has done you grievous wrong. And he has the face to tell you so; and to exult in his dishonesty. What man is there whose countenance would not be flushed with momentary indignation, at being so confronted with one that had injured him, and that gloried in the injury! And *let* us concede thus much to the weakness of nature, or even to the first impulse of virtue. But the *next* feeling should be unfeigned regret and pity. Yes, the man who stands before you, triumphing in a prosperous fraud, and palpable wrong, is the most pitiable of human beings. He has done himself a deeper, a far deeper injury, than he has done to you. It is the inflicter of wrong, not the sufferer, whom God beholds with mingled displeasure and compassion; and his judgment should be your law. Where

amidst the benedictions of the Holy Mount is there one for this man? But upon the merciful—the peace-makers—the persecuted—they are poured out freely; these are the sacred names, upon which the spirit and blessing of Jesus descend.

II. In the next place, it may temper the warmth of our indignation against sin, and soften it into pity; it may well bring us, indeed, to imitate the compassion of Jesus, for us to reflect, that what others are, and however bad, we, in other circumstances, might have been as they are.

We are all men of like passions, propensities, exposures. There are elements in us all, which might have been perverted, through the successive processes of moral deterioration, to the worst of crimes. The wretch whom the execration of the thronging crowd pursues to the scaffold or the gibbet, is not worse than any one of that multitude might have become, in similar circumstances. He is to be condemned, indeed; but how much he is to be pitied, let his burning passions, his consuming remorse, his pallid cheek, his sinking head, the mingled apathy and agony of his apprehensions—let these tell.

I feel that I am speaking of a case that is fully practical. There is a vindictive feeling in society, towards convicted and capital offenders, towards those who are doomed to abide the awful severity of the law, that does not become the frail and the sinful. I do not adopt the unqualified language, that it is nothing but the grace of God that saves us from being as bad, as the worst of criminals. But it is certain that we owe much to the good providence of God, ordaining for us a lot more favourable to virtue. It is certain that we

all had that within us, that might have been pushed to the same excess. And therefore, a silent pity and sorrow for the victim, should mingle with our detestation of the crime.

The very pirate, that dyes the ocean-wave with the blood of his fellow-beings; that meets with his defenceless victim in some lonely sea where no cry for help can be heard, and plunges his dagger to the heart which is pleading for life,—which is calling upon him by all the names of kindred, of children and home, to spare—yes, the very pirate is such a man, as you or I, might have been. Orphanage in childhood; an unfriended youth; an evil companion; a resort to sinful pleasure; familiarity with vice; a scorned and blighted name; seared and crushed affections; desperate fortunes—these are steps that might have led any one among us, to unfurl upon the high seas the bloody flag of universal defiance; to have waged war with our kind; to have put on the terrific attributes, to have done the dreadful deeds, and to have died, the awful death of the ocean robber. How many affecting relationships of humanity plead with us to pity him! That head, that is doomed to pay the price of blood, once rested upon a mother's bosom. The hand that did that accursed work, and shall soon be stretched, cold and nerveless, in the felon's grave, was once taken and cherished by a father's hand, and led in the ways of sportive childhood and innocent pleasure. The dreaded monster of crime, has once been the object of sisterly love, and all domestic endearment. Pity him, then. Pity his blighted hope, and his crushed heart. It is a wholesome sensibility. It is reasonable; it is meet for frail and sinning creatures like us to cherish.

It foregoes no moral discrimination. It feels the crime; but feels it as a weak, tempted, and rescued creature should. It imitates the great Master; and looks with indignation upon the offender, and yet is grieved for him.

III. In the last place, I would set forth the intrinsic worth and greatness of this disposition as a reason for cherishing it. This rank does the virtue of compassion hold in the character of our Saviour.

How superior is the man of forbearance and gentleness to every other man, in the collisions of society! He is the real conqueror: the conqueror of himself; but that is not all; he conquers others. There is no dominion in the social world like this. It is a dominion which makes not slaves, but freemen; which levies no tribute but of gratitude; whose only monuments are those of virtuous example.

No man may claim much merit, merely for being indignant at the faults and sins of those around him. It is better than indifference, better than no feeling; but it is only the beginning and youth of virtue. The youthful, untutored, unsubdued mind is *only* angry with sin; and thinks it does well to be angry. But when more reflection comes, and a deeper consciousness of personal deficiencies; and a more entire subjection to the meek and compassionate spirit of Jesus Christ is wrought out in the mind, a new character begins to develop itself. Harsh words, borne upon the breath of a hasty temper, do not ruffle the soul as they once did. Reproof is received, with meekness and in silence. The tongue is not ever ready, as if it were an instrument made to ward off reproach. The peace of the soul does not stand in the opinion of others. Faults

are estimated with forbearance. Mature and fixed virtue is too high and strong to think of building itself up, like a doubtful reputation, upon surrounding deficiencies. Sins are more immediately and habitually connected with the sufferings they must occasion; and therefore they more surely awaken pity. The man of advancing piety and virtue is growing in the conviction, indeed, that the only real, essential, immitigable evil is sin. He mourns over it in himself; he mourns over it in others. It is the root of bitterness in the field of life. It is the foe with which he is holding the long, and often disheartening conflict. It is the cloud upon the face of nature. That cloud overspreads his neighbour, with himself. And he pities, from his inmost soul, all who walk beneath it.

Patience with the erring and offending, is one of the loftiest of all the forms of character. "Compassion for souls," though the phrase is often used in a cant and technical manner, ought to be a great and ennobling sentiment. Compassion, indeed, for souls—how should it transcend all other compassion! Look over the world, and say—where are its sufferings? In the diseased body, in the broken limb, in the wounded and bruised organs of sense? In the desolate dwelling of poverty—in hunger, and cold and nakedness? Yes, suffering is there; and Providence has put a tongue in every suffering member of the human frame, to plead its cause. But enter into the soul—pass through these outworks, and enter the very seat of power; and what things are there—uttering no sound perhaps, breathing no complaint—but what things are there to move compassion? Wounded and bruised affections, blighted capacities, broken and defeated hopes; desolation,

solitariness, silence, sorrow, anguish—and sin, the cause and consummation of all the deepest miseries of an afflicted life. If the surgeon's knife should cut the very heart, it would hardly inflict a sharper pang than anger, envy, smiting shame, and avenging remorse. Yet, happiness is near that heart; happiness, the breath of infinite goodness, the blessed voice of mercy, is all around it; and it is all madly shunned. Eternal happiness is offered to it; and it rejects the offer. It goes on, and on, through life, inwardly burthened, groaning in secret, bleeding, weltering in its passions; but it will not seek the true relief. Its wounds are without cause; its sufferings without recompense; its life without true comfort; and its end without hope. Compassion, indeed, for souls! who may not justly feel it for others, and for his own?

So Jesus looked upon the world—save that *he* had no compassion to feel for himself; and so much the more touching was his compassion for us. From the sublime height of his own immaculate purity, he looked down upon a sinful, and degraded, and afflicted race. "Weep not for me," he said, "but weep for yourselves and your children." So Jesus looked upon the world, and pitied it. He taught us, that we might be wise: he was poor that we might be rich; he suffered that we might be happy; he wept that we might rejoice; he died—he died the accursed death of the cross, that we might live—live for ever.

DISCOURSE XVII.

GOD'S LOVE; THE CHIEF RESTRAINT FROM SIN, AND RESOURCE IN SORROW.

1 JOHN, 4. 16. GOD IS LOVE.

IT was a saying of Plato, that "the soul is mere darkness, till it is illuminated with the knowledge of God." What Plato said of the soul, is true of every thing. Every thing is dark, till the light of God's perfection shines upon it. That "God is love," is the great central truth, that gives brightness to every other truth. Not only the moral system, but nature, and the science of nature, would be dark without that truth. I am persuaded, it might be shown, that it is the great, essential principle, which lies at the foundation of all interesting knowledge. It may not be always distinctly observed by the philosopher; but how could he proceed in those investigations that are leading him through all the labyrinths of nature, if it were not for the conviction secretly working within him, that all is right, that all is well! How could he have the heart to pursue his way, as he is penetrating into the mysteries, whether of rolling worlds or of vegetating atoms, if he felt that the system he was exploring, was a system of boundless malevolence! He would stand aghast

and powerless, at that thought. It would spread a shadow, darker than universal eclipse, over the splendour of heaven. It would endow every particle of earth with a principle of malignity, too awful for the hardiest philosophic scrutiny!

The Scriptures assign the same pre-eminence to the doctrine of divine goodness, which it holds in nature and philosophy. It is never said, in Scripture, that God is greatness, or power, or knowledge; but with a comprehensive and affecting emphasis, it is written that GOD IS LOVE; not that he is lovely, not that he is good, not that he is benevolent, merely—that would be too abstract for the great, vital, life-giving truth—but it is written, I repeat, that, God is love!

And it is not of this truth as an abstract truth, my friends, that I propose now to speak. I wish to consider chiefly its applications; and especially its applications to two great conditions of human life; to the conditions of temptation, and sorrow. Affliction, we know, is sometimes addressed with worldly consolations; and sin is often assailed with denunciation and alarm; yet for both alike, and for all that makes up the mingled conflict and sorrow and hope of life, it seems to me that a deep and affectionate trust in the love of God, is the only powerful, sustaining, and controlling principle.

Let me say again—an affectionate trust; the faith, in other words, that works by love. It is not a cold, speculative, theological faith, that can prepare us to meet the discipline of life. It is the confidence of love only that can carry us through. Love only can understand love. This only can enable us to say "we have known and believed the love, that God hath to us."

We profess to believe in God; to believe in the divine perfection. But, I say, my brethren, that we do not properly know what we believe in, without love to it. Love only can understand love. Love only can give to faith in divine love, its proper character; and especially that character of assurance and strength, which will enable us to meet, unshaken and unfaltering, the temptations and trials of life.

The principle that is to meet exigencies like these, that is to hold the long conflict with sin and sorrow, that is to sustain triumphantly the burthen of this mortal experience, must be intelligent, active, penetrating, and powerful. For, the problem of this life, my brethren, is not readily, nor easily to be solved. I know that there is light upon it; welcome light. But it cannot be carried into the mazes of human experience, it cannot illuminate what is dark, and clear up what is difficult, without much reflection—and reflection upon what, if not upon the character of the Ordainer of this lot?—without much reflection. I repeat, and care, every way, to the direction and posture of our own minds. It was not intended that our faith should be a passive principle; that all should be plain and easy to it; that moral light should fall upon our path, as clear, obvious and bright as sunshine. It pleases God to try the reliance of his earthly children. He would have their trust in him to be a nobler act than mere vision could be. He would have their faith grow and strengthen by severe exercise. He would say to them at last, not only "well done, good!—but "well done, *faithful!*—enter ye into the joys of your Lord: enter into joys, made dear by sorrow, made bright, by the darkness you have experienced, made

noble and glorious, by the trying of your faith which is more precious than of gold."

I said, that the problem of this life is not readily nor easily to be solved. I can conceive that this may be an unmeaning declaration, to those who have not thought much of life, to those, whose lot has been easy, and whose minds have partaken of the easiness of their lot. But there are those, to whom the visitation of life, to whom the visitation of thought and feeling, has been a different thing. I can believe that there are some to whom I speak, whose minds have been haunted from their very childhood, with that mournful and touching inquiry which we used to read in our early lessons, "child of mortality! whence comest thou?" Man is, indeed, the child of a frail, changing, mortal lot; and yet the creature of an immortal hope. We are ready to ask such a being, at whom we must wonder as it seems to me, whence camest thou, and for what end? Didst thou come, frail being! from the source of strength and wisdom and goodness? Why then, so feeble, so unwise, so unworthy? Why art thou here, and such as thou art—so strong in grief, and so weak in fortitude! so boundless in aspiration, so poor in possession! Why art thou here?—with this strangely mingled being; so glad and so sorrowful; so earthly and so heavenly; so in love with life, and so weary of it; so eagerly clinging to life, and yet borne away by a sighing breath of the evening air! Whence, and wherefore, frail man! art thou such an one? All else is well; but with *thee* all is not well. The world is fair around thee; the bright and blessed sun shineth on thee; the green and flowery fields spread far, and cheer thine eye, and invite thy footstep; the groves

are full of melody; ten thousand happy creatures range freely through all the paths of nature; but *thou* art not satisfied as they are—*thou* art not happy—thou art not provided for as they are: earth has no coverts for thy sheltering; thou must toil, thou must build houses, and gather defences for thy frailty; and in the sweat of thy brow, must thou eat thy bread. And when all is done, thou must die; and thou knowest it. Death, strange visitant, is ever approaching to meet thee; death, dark gate of mystery, is ever the termination of thy path!

But, my brethren, is this all? To live, to toil, to struggle, to suffer, to sorrow, to die—is this all? No, it is not all; but it is God's love, and the revelation of God's love in the promise of immortality, only, that can assure us that there is more. And so necessary do these seem to me, to bear up the thinking, feeling, suffering, hoping, inquiring mind; so necessary is it, that a voice of God should speak to the creatures of this earthly discipline,—necessary as that a parental voice should be ready and near to hush the cry of infancy, —that instead of stumbling at marvels and miracles, at interpositions and teachings, I confess, I have sometimes wondered that there were not more of them. I have wondered that the manifestations of God, did not oftener appear in the blazing bush, and the cloud-capt mountain. I have wondered that the curtain of mystery, that hides the other world, were not sometimes lifted up; that the cherubim of mercy and of hope were not sometimes throned on the clouds of the eventide; that the bright and silent stars, did not sometimes break the deep stillness that reigns among them, with the scarcely fabled music of their

spheres; that the rich flood of morning light, as it bathes the earth in love, did not utter voices from its throne of heavenly splendour, to proclaim the goodness of God. No, I wonder not at marvels and miracles. That scene on the Mount of transfiguration—Moses and Elias talking with our Saviour—seems to me, so far from being strange and incredible, to meet a want of the mind; and I only wonder, if I may venture to say so, that it is not sometimes repeated.

Yet why should I say this? The love of God to us, is sure; and it is a sufficient assurance. Trust in him is a sustaining principle; and it is sufficient strength. There *is* another state of being for us—perish all reason and all faith! if it is not so—there *is* another state of being for us; and though the eye hath not seen it, and the ear hath caught no sound from its wide realm, the great promise and hope are sufficient.

I say, the love of God is sure. He does love the moral beings whom he has made in his image; loves them, I doubt not, in their fears and doubtings and struggles and sorrows; loves them, I believe, even in their sins, nay, and has commended his love to them in this very character—has commended his love to them, in that while they were yet sinners, Christ died for them.

Can you doubt whether man is the object of God's love? Look at the feeble insect tribes, sporting in the beams of life, happy in their hour, perishing but to give life to others. Is he not a kind Being, who made even *these?* Is it not the breath of love, in which even *they* live? Look at all the ranks and orders of irrational creatures, that inhabit the fields, the groves,

the mountains, the living streams of ocean. Look at the free and fleet rangers of the forest. Go thou, and unfold the inward frame of such an one; trace every part of the wonderful mechanism; mark every sinew; follow the courses of its life-blood; see every skilful and exquisite adaptation for sustenance, for strength, for speed, for beauty. Is not this the workmanship of goodness? *Could* any but a kind and gracious Being have done this? "Ask, now, of the beasts, says Job, and they shall teach thee; and the fowls of the air, and they shall tell thee; or speak to the earth, and it shall teach thee; and the fishes of the sea shall declare unto thee."

But turn, now, from all these, and look—yes, look at one human heart. How infinite the difference! The human heart—say what we will of it, let the cynic or the skeptic say what he will—but what a concentration of energies, what a gathering up of mighty thoughts, what a home of dear and gentle affections, what a deep fountain of tears and sorrows, is there! What strugglings are pent up within its narrow enclosure; what mighty powers sleep within its folding bosom; what images of the grand, the godlike, the indefinite, the eternal, lie in its unfathomable depths! Doth not the Maker of that heart regard it with kindness? Doth he not pity a being that can sorrow? Doth he not love a being whom he hath made capable of love—of all its yearning, of all its tenderness? Doth he not care for a being, whom he hath made capable of improving for ever?

Assuredly, if nature speaks truth, if revelation utters wisdom, he does love his rational offspring. How strong is the language of that revelation! "Can a mo-

ther forget her child? Yea, she may forget, yet will not I forget thee."

Let this, then, be settled in every heart as one of the great convictions of life; let it be taken to the soul as a part of the armour of God, to defend it against this world's temptations and calamities. We may not all, or we may not always feel the need of it; but we do all need it, and we need it always. Always, I say: for we are always exposed to sin, and we are always exposed to sorow. Let us look at these conditions of human life for a few moments, to see how the apprehension of God's love to us is fitted to restrain us in the one case, and to comfort us in the other.

Nothing would be so effectual to restrain us from sin, if we felt it, as the love of God to us; nothing would be so effectual to recall us from our wanderings. It is a lofty conviction, of which I speak, my brethren, and not the ordinary and dull acknowledgment, the mere theological inference, that God is good. Let any one feel that God is as truly good to him, as truly loves him, is as really interested for his welfare, as his father, or his most devoted friend; that even when he is rebellious and disobedient, the good and blessed God pities him, and pleads with him to return, pleads with him even through the sufferings of Christ, his Son; let him feel that the kind and gracious Creator has fashioned that wonderful but abused mind within him, called forth those sweet, but neglected affections, provided dear objects for them, given him home, given him friends, showered mercies upon him; let him thus feel how ungenerous and ungrateful is the course of sin and vice; and surely all this, if any

thing can, will touch him with conviction, and move him to repentance. Let it be so, that all other motives have failed; but who of us, if he rightly saw it, could lift his hand against that which is all love? Who of us, if he felt that love to him, and to all around him—who could be selfish, contemptuous, haughty, or hard-hearted towards his brother? Who of us, if he saw all the gifts of life to be the sacred gifts of that love, could abuse them to purposes of selfish ambition, or vicious indulgence?——The spirit of the sinner, the spirit of sin, I mean, so far as it goes, is a reckless spirit. The offender cares not, very much in proportion as he feels that nobody cares for him. He hardens himself against every thing, the more, because he supposes that every thing is hardened against him. And when he goes to the worst excesses in vice, the manifest scorn of his fellow-creatures is the last influence that steels his heart against every better feeling. And yet even then, there is sometimes left one thought, that moves him to tears. It is the thought of his mother, dwelling alone, perhaps, in his far distant and forsaken home: it is the thought of his mother, who sighs in secret places for him; who still mingles his outcast name, with every evening prayer, saying, "Oh! restore my poor child!" But let him remember, that even if his mother should forget, God does not forget him; does not forsake him; does not withdraw all his mercies from him His friends may withdraw themselves; he may have no earthly bosom to lean upon!—but the elements em bosom him around; the air breathes upon him a breath of kindness; the sun shines beneficently upon him; the page of mercy is spread for him; and it is

written over with invitations and promises; it says, in accents that might break a heart of stone, "turn thou! turn, thou forsaken one! for why wilt thou die?"

So effectual, my brethren, did we rightly consider it, might be the love of God to restrain us from sin, and recall us to virtue and piety.

Equally might it avail, and equally indispensable is it, to comfort us in affliction. I have already spoken of the afflictions of life, and need not repeat what I then said. Suffice it, that every heart knows what it has to suffer, and to struggle with. But one thing I am sure of, that that heart can find no repose but in a firm trust in the infinite love of God. I speak now for a reasonable mind, for one that is not willing to suffer blindly as a brute suffers, for one that does not find it enough to conclude that it must suffer and cannot help it. I speak for one whom sorrow has aroused to consider the great questions, wherefore he is made, and why he is made to suffer; and I am sure that such an one must behold goodness enthroned and reigning over all the events of time and the destinies of eternity; or for his mind, there is no friend nor helper in the universe. Ah! there are questions, which nothing can answer, but God's love; which nothing can meet, but God's promise; which nothing can calm, but a perfect trust in his goodness. Speak to the void darkness of affliction, "the first dark day of nothingness" after trouble has come; speak to life, through all its stages and fortunes, from oftentimes suffering infancy to trembling age; speak to this crowded world of events, accidents, and vicissitudes; ay, or speak thou to the inward world of the heart, with all its strifes, its sinkings, its misgivings, its re-

membrances, its strange visitings of long gone thoughts,

"Touching the electric chain wherewith we are darkly bound,"

and none of these can answer us; we call as vainly upon them, as the priests of Baal upon their god. There is shadow and mystery upon all the creation, till we see God in it; there is trouble and fear, till we see God's love in it.

But give me that assurance; and though there are many things which I know not, many things which I cannot explain nor understand, yet I can consent *not* to know them. Enough, enough to know, that God is good, and what he does is right. This known; and the works of creation, the changes of life, the destinies of eternity, are all spread before us, as the dispensations and counsels of infinite love. This known; and then we know, that the love of God is working to issues, like itself, beyond all thought and imagination, good and glorious; and that the only reason why we understand it not, is, that it is too glorious for us to understand. This known: and what then do we say? God's love taketh care for all—nothing is neglected—God's love watcheth over all, provideth for all, maketh wise adaptations for all; for age, for infancy, for maturity, for childhood in every scene of this, or another life; for want, for weakness, for joy, and for sorrow, and even for sin; so that even the wrath of man shall praise the goodness of God. All is good; all is well; all is right; and shall be for ever. This, Oh! this is an inheritance, and a refuge, and a rest for the mind, from which the convulsions of worlds cannot shake it.

In what an aspect does this conviction present the scenes of eternity? We are placed here in a state of imperfection and trial, and much that seems like mys-

tery and mischance. But what shall the future be, if the light of God's goodness is to shine through its ages? I answer, it shall be all bright disclosure, full consummation, blessed recompense. We shall doubtless *see*, what we can now only believe. The cloud will be lifted up, and will unveil—eternity! And what an eternity! All brightness; all beatitude; one unclouded vision; one immeasurable progress! The gate of mystery shall be past, and the full light shall shine for ever. Blessed change! That which caused us trial, shall yield us triumph. That which was the deeper darkness, shall be but the brighter light. That which made the heart ache, shall fill it with gladness. Tears shall be wiped away; and beamings of joy shall come in their place. He who tried the soul that he loved, shall more abundantly comfort the soul that he approves. That God, who has walked in the mysterious way, with clouds and darkness around about him, will then appear as the great Revealer: and he will reveal what the eye hath not seen, nor the ear heard, nor the heart conceived.

Let me insist, in close, as I did in the beginning, upon the necessity of this affectionate trust in God. We cannot live as reasonable beings upon any conviction less lofty, less divine, less heartfelt than this. This is not a matter of will; it is a matter of necessity. Our minds cannot have a full and, at the same time, safe development; reflection and feeling cannot safely grow in us, unless they are guided, relieved and sustained by the contemplations of piety. The fresh and unworn sensibility of youth may hold on for awhile, and may keep its fountain clear and bright; but, by and bye, changes will come on; affliction will lay its

chastening hand upon us; disappointment will settle, like a chilling damp, upon the spirits; the mind will be discouraged, if there is nothing but earthly hope to cheer it on; the reasonings of misanthropy and the misgivings of scepticism will steal into it, and blight its generous affections; morbid sensitiveness will take the place of healthful feeling; all this will naturally come on, with the growing experience of life, if the love of God be not our support and safeguard. Every mind may not be conscious of this tendency, but every mind that thinks much and feels deeply, will be conscious of it, and will feel it bitterly. Your body may live on; but your soul, in its full development, in its deep wants, in its "strong hour" of trial and of reflection, must pine, and perish, and die, without this holy trust. Let it not so perish. Creature of God's love! believe in that love which gave thee being. Believe in that love which every moment redeems thee from death, and offers to redeem thee from the death eternal. Believe in God's love, and be wise, be patient, be comforted, be cheerful and happy—be happy in time; be happy in eternity!

DISCOURSE XVIII.

THE VOICES OF THE DEAD.

HEBREWS 11. 4. And by it, he being dead, yet speaketh.

This is a record of virtue that existed six thousand years ago; but which yet liveth in its memory, and speaketh in its example. "Abel, it is written, offered unto God a more excellent sacrifice than Cain, by which he obtained witness, that he was righteous, God testifying of his gifts; and by it, he being dead, yet speaketh." How enduring is the memorial of goodness! It is but a sentence, which is read in a moment—it is but a leaf from the scroll of time; and yet, it is borne on the breath of ages—it takes the attributes of universality and eternity—it becomes a heritage, from family to family, among all the dwellings of the world.

But it is not Abel alone, the accepted worshipper and martyred brother, that thus speaks to us. The world is filled with the voices of the dead. They speak not from the public records of the great world only, but from the private history of our own experience. They speak to us in a thousand remembrances, in a thousand incidents, events, associations. They speak to us, not only from their silent graves, but from the throng of life. Though they are invisible, yet life is

filled with their presence. They are with us, by the silent fireside and in the secluded chamber: they are with us in the paths of society, and in the crowded assembly of men. They speak to us from the lonely way-side; and they speak to us, from the venerable walls that echo to the steps of a multitude, and to the voice of prayer. Go where we will, the dead are with us. We live, we converse, with those, who once lived and conversed with us. Their well remembered tone mingles with the whispering breezes, with the sound of the falling leaf, with the jubilee shout of the spring-time. The earth is filled with their shadowy train.

But there are more substantial expressions of the presence of the dead with the living. The earth is filled with the labours, the works, of the dead. Almost all the literature in the world, the discoveries of science, the glories of art, the ever-during temples, the dwelling-places of generations, the comforts and improvements of life, the languages, the maxims, the opinions, of the living, the very frame-work of society, the institutions of nations, the fabrics of empire—all are the works of the dead: by these, they who are dead yet speak. Life—busy, eager, craving, importunate, absorbing life—yet what is its sphere, compared with the empire of death! What, in other words, is the sphere of visible, compared with the mighty empire of invisible, life! A moment in time; a speck in immensity; a shadow amidst enduring and unchangeable realities; a breath of existence amidst the ages and regions of undying life! They live—they live indeed, whom we call dead. They live in our thoughts; they live in our blessings; they live in our life: "death hath no power over them."

Let us then meditate upon those—the mighty company of our departed brethren—who occupy such a space in the universe of being. Let us meditate upon their relation, their message, their ministry, to us. Let us look upon ourselves in this relation, and see what we owe to the dead. Let us look upon the earth, and see if death hath not left behind its desolating career, some softer traces, some holier imprint, than of destruction.

I. What memories, then, have the dead left among us, to stimulate us to virtue, to win us to goodness.

The approach to death often prepares the way for this impression. The effect of a last sickness to develope and perfect the virtues of our friends, is often so striking and beautiful, as to seem more than a compensation for all the sufferings of disease. It is the practice of the Catholic Church to bestow upon its eminent saints, a title to the perpetual homage of the faithful, in the act of canonization. But what is a formal decree, compared with the effect of a last sickness, to canonize the virtue that we love, for eternal remembrance and admiration? How often does that touching decay, that gradual unclothing of the mortal body, seem to be a putting on of the garments of immortal beauty and life! That pale cheek, that placid brow, that sweet serenity spread over the whole countenance, that spiritual, almost supernatural brightness of the eye, as if light from another world already shone through it, that noble and touching disinterestedness of the parting spirit, which utters no complaint, which breathes no sigh, which speaks no word of fear nor apprehension to wound its friend—which is calm, and cheerful, and natural, and self-sustained, amidst daily

declining strength and the sure approach to death—and then, at length, when concealment is no longer possible, that last firm, triumphant, consoling discourse, and that last look of all mortal tenderness and immortal trust;—what hallowed memories are these to soothe, to purify, to enrapture surviving love!

Death, too, sets a seal upon the excellence, that sickness unfolds and consecrates. There is no living virtue, concerning which—such is our frailty—we must not fear that it may fall; or, at least, that it may somewhat fail from its steadfastness. It is a painful, it is a just fear, in the bosoms of the best and purest beings on earth, that some dreadful lapse *may* come over them, or over those whom they hold in the highest reverence. But, death, fearful, mighty as its power, is yet a power, that is subject to virtue. It gives victory to virtue. It brings relief to the heart, from its profoundest fear. It enables us to say, "now all is safe! The battle is fought; the victory is won. The course is finished; the race is run; the faith is kept: henceforth, it is no more doubt nor danger, no more temptation nor strife; henceforth is the reward of the just, the crown which the Lord, the righteous Judge will give!" Yes, death—dark power of earth though it seem—does yet ensphere virtue, as it were, in heaven. It sets it up on high, for eternal admiration. It fixes its place never more to be changed—as a star to shine onward, and onward, through the depths of the everlasting ages!

In life there are many things which interfere with a just estimate of the virtues of others. There are, in some cases, jealousies, and misconstructions, and there are false appearances; there are veils upon the heart

that hide its most secret workings and its sweetest affections from us; there are earthly clouds that come between us and the excellence that we love. So that it is not, perhaps, till a friend is taken from us, that we entirely feel his value, and appreciate his worth. The vision is loveliest at its vanishing away; and we perceive not, perhaps, till we see the parting wing, that an angel has been with us.

Yet if we are *not*, from any cause, or in any degree, blind to the excellence we possess, if we do feel all the value of the treasure which our affections hold dear; yet, I say, how does that earthly excellence take not only a permanent, but a saintly character, as it passes beyond the bounds of mortal frailty and imperfection! how does death enshrine it, for a homage, more reverential and holy, than is ever given to living worth! So that the virtues of the dead gain, perhaps, in the power of sanctity, what they lose in the power of visible presence; and thus—it may not be too much to say—thus the virtues of the dead benefit us sometimes, as much as the examples of living goodness.

How beautiful is the ministration, by which those who are dead, thus speak to us—thus help us, comfort us, guide, gladden, bless us! How grateful must it be to their thoughts of us, to know that we thus remember them; that we remember them, not with mere admiration, but in a manner that ministers to all our virtues! What a glorious vision of the future, is it, to the good and pure who are yet living on earth, that the virtues which they are cherishing and manifesting, the good character which they are building up here,—the charm of their benevolence and piety, shall live, when they have laid down the burthen and toil of life—shall be an

inspiring breath to the fainting hearts that are broken from them—a wafted odour of sanctity to hundreds and thousands that shall come after them. Is it not so? Are there not those, the simplest story, the frailest record of whose goodness, is still, and ever, doing good? But, frail records, we know full well—frail records they are *not*, which are in our hearts. And can we have known those, whom it is a joy as well as a sorrow, to think of, and not be better for it? Are there those,—once, our friends, now bright angels, in some blessed sphere—and do we not sometimes say, "perhaps, that pure eye of affection is on me now; and I will do nothing to wound it?" No, surely, it cannot be, that the dead will speak to us in vain. Their memories are all around us: their footsteps are in our paths; the memorials of them meet our eye at every turn; their presence is in our dwellings; their voices are in our ears; they speak to us—in the sad reverie of contemplation, in the sharp pang of feeling, in the cold shadow of memory, in the bright light of hope—and it cannot be, that they will speak in vain.

II. Nay, the very world we live in,—is it not consecrated to us by the memory of the dead? Are not the very scenes of life made more interesting to us, by being connected with thoughts that run backward far beyond the range of present life. This is another view of the advantage and effect with which those who are "dead, yet speak to us."

If we were beings, to whom, present, immediate, instant enjoyment were every thing; if we were animals, in other words, with all our thoughts prone to the earth on which we tread, the case would be different; the conclusion would be different. But we

are beings of a deeper nature, of wider relations, of higher aspirations, of a loftier destiny. And being such, I cannot hesitate to say for myself, that I would not have every thing which I behold on earth, the work of the present, living generation. The world would be comparatively, an ordinary, indifferent place, if it contained nothing but the workmanship, the handicraft, the devices of living men. No, I would see dwellings, which speak to me of other things, than earthly convenience, or fleeting pleasure; which speak to me the holy recollections of lives which were passed in them, and have passed away from them. I would see temples in which successive generations of men have prayed. I would see ruins, on whose mighty walls is inscribed the touching story of joy, and sorrow, love, heroism, patience, which lived there—there, breathed its first hope, its last sigh —ages ago. I would behold scenes, which offer more than fair landscape and living stream to my eye; which tell me of inspired genius, glorious fortitude, martyred faith, that studied there—suffered there—died there. I would behold the earth, in fine, when it is spread before me, as more than soil and scenery, rich and fair, though they be; I would behold the earth as written over with histories; as a sublime page, on which are recorded the lives of men, and empires.

The world, even of nature, is not one laughing, gay scene. It is not so in fact; it appears not so in the light of our sober, solemn, Christian teachings. The dark cloud sometimes overshadows it: the storm sweeps through its pleasant valleys; the thunder smites its everlasting hills; and the holy record hath

said, "thorns and thistles shall it bring forth to thee." It has been said that all the tones in nature are—to use the musical phrase—on the minor key. That is to say, they are plaintive tones. And although the fact is probably somewhat exaggerated, when stated so strongly and unqualifiedly, yet to a certain extent it is true. It is true, that that tone always mingles with the music of nature. In the winds that stir the mountain pine, as well as in the wailing storm; in the soft-falling shower, and in the rustling of the autumn leaves; in the roar of ocean, as it breaks upon the lonely sea-beach; in the thundering cataract, that lifts up its eternal anthem amidst the voices of nature; and so likewise, in those inarticulate interpretations of nature, the bleating of flocks, the lowing of herds, and even in the song of birds there is usually something plaintive; something that touches the sad and brooding spirit of thought. And the contemplation of nature in all its forms, as well of beauty as of sublimity, is apt to be tinged with melancholy. And all the higher musings, the nobler aspirations of the mind, possess something of this character. I doubt if there were ever, a manifestation of genius in the world, that did not bear something of this trait.

It can scarcely be the part of wisdom, then, to refuse to sympathize with this spirit of nature and humanity. And it can be no argument against a contemplation of this world, as having its abodes sanctified by the memory of the departed, as having its brightness softly veiled over by the shadow of death; it can be no argument against such contemplation, that it is somewhat sober and sad. I feel then, that the dead have conferred a blessing upon me, in help-

ing me to think of the world thus rightly; in thus giving a hue of sadness to the scenes of this world, while, at the same time, they have clothed it with every glorious and powerful charm of association. This mingled spirit of energy and humility, of triumph and tenderness, of glorying and sorrowing, is the very spirit of Christianity. It was the spirit of Jesus—the conqueror and the sufferer. Death was before him; and yet his thoughts were of triumph. Victory was in his view; and yet, what a victory! No laurel crown was upon his head; no flush of pride was upon his brow; no exultation flashed from his eye; for his was a victory to be gained over death, and through death. No laurel crown sat upon his head—but a crown of thorns; no flush of pride was on his brow—but meekness was enthroned there; no exultation flashed from his eye—but tears flowed from it: "Jesus wept."

Come, then, to us, that spirit, at once, of courage and meekness; of fortitude, and gentleness; of a life hopeful and happy, but thoughtful of death; of a world bright and beautiful, but passing away! So let us live, and act; and think, and feel; and let us thank the good providence, the good ordination of heaven, that has made the dead our teachers.

III. But they teach us more. They not only leave their own enshrined and canonized virtues for us to love and imitate; they not only gather about us the glorious and touching associations of the past, to hallow and dignify this world to us, and to throw the soft veil of memory over all its scenes; but they open a future world to our vision, and invite us to its blessed abodes.

They open that world to us, by giving, in their own deaths, a strong proof of its existence.

The future, indeed, to mere earthly views, is often "a land of darkness as darkness itself, and of the shadow of death without any order, and where the light is as darkness." Truly, death is "without any order." There is in it, such a total disregard to circumstances, as shows that it cannot be an ultimate event. That must be connected with something else; that cannot be final, which, considered as final, puts all the calculations of wisdom, so utterly at defiance. The tribes of animals, the classes and species of the vegetable creation, come to their perfection, and then die. But is there any such order for human beings? Do the generations of mankind go down to the grave, in ranks and processions? Are the human, like the vegetable races, suffered to stand till they have made provision for their successors, before they depart? No; without order, without discrimination, without provision for the future, or remedy for the past, the children of men depart. They die—the old, the young; the most useless, and those most needed; the worst and the best, alike die; and if there be no scenes beyond this life, if there be no circumstances, nor allotments to explain the mystery, then all around us, is, as it was to the doubting spirit of Job, "a land of darkness as darkness itself." The blow falls, like the thunder-bolt beneath the dark cloud; but it has not even the intention, the explanation, that belongs to that dread minister. The stroke of death must be more reckless than even the lightning's flash—yes, that solemn visitation that cometh with so many dread signs—the body's dissolution, the spirit's extremity,

the winding up of the great scene of life, has not even the meaning that belongs to the blindest agents in nature, if there be no reaction, no revelation hereafter! Can this be? Doth God take care for things animate and inanimate, and will he not care for us?

Let us look at it for a moment. I have seen one die—the delight of his friends, the pride of his kindred, the hope of his country: but he died! How beautiful was that offering upon the altar of death! The fire of genius kindled in his eye; the generous affections of youth mantled in his cheek; his foot was upon the threshold of life; his studies, his preparations for honoured and useful life, were completed; his breast was filled with a thousand glowing, and noble, and never yet expressed aspirations: but he died! He died; while another, of a nature dull, coarse, and unrefined, of habits low, base, and brutish, of a promise that had nothing in it but shame and misery—such an one, I say, was suffered to encumber the earth. Could this be, if there were no other sphere for the gifted, the aspiring, and the approved, to act in? Can we believe that the energy just trained for action, the embryo thought just bursting into expression, the deep and earnest passion of a noble nature, just swelling into the expansion of every beautiful virtue, should never manifest its power, should never speak, should never unfold itself? Can we believe that all this should die; while meanness, corruption, sensuality, and every deformed and dishonoured power, should live? No, ye goodly and glorious ones! ye godlike in youthful virtue!—ye die not in vain: ye teach, ye assure us, that ye are gone to some world of nobler life and action.

I have seen one die; she was beautiful; and beautiful were the ministries of life that were given her to fulfil. Angelic loveliness enrobed her; and a grace as if it were caught from heaven, breathed in every tone, hallowed every affection, shone in every action—invested, as a halo, her whole existence, and made it a light and blessing, a charm and a vision of gladness, to all around her: but she died! Friendship, and love, and parental fondness, and infant weakness, stretched out their hand to save her; but they could not save her: and she died! What! did all that loveliness die? Is there no land of the blessed and the lovely ones, for such to live in? Forbid it reason, religion!—bereaved affection, and undying love! forbid the thought! It cannot be that such die in God's counsel, who live even in frail human memory, forever!

I have seen one die—in the maturity of every power, in the earthly perfection of every faculty; when many temptations had been overcome, and many hard lessons had been learned; when many experiments had made virtue easy, and had given a facility to action, and a success to endeavour; when wisdom had been learnt from many mistakes, and a skill had been laboriously acquired in the use of many powers; and the being, I looked upon, had just compassed that most useful, most practical of all knowledge, how to live, and to act well and wisely: yet I have seen such an one die! Was all this treasure gained, only to be lost? Were all these faculties trained, only to be thrown into utter disuse? Was this instrument—the intelligent soul, the noblest in the universe—was it so laboriously fashioned, and by the most varied and expensive apparatus, that, on the

very moment of being finished, it should be cast away forever? No, the dead, as we call them, do not *so* die. They carry our thoughts to another and a nobler existence. They teach us, and especially by all the strange and seemingly untoward circumstances of their departure from this life, that they, and we, shall live forever. They open the future world, then, to our faith.

They open it also, and in fine, to our affections. No person of reflection and piety can have lived long, without beginning to find, in regard to the earthly objects that most interest him—his friends—that the balance is gradually inclining in favour of another world. How many, after the middle period of life, and especially in declining years, must feel—if the experience of life has had any just effect upon them—that the objects of their strongest attachment are not here. One by one, the ties of earthly affection are cut asunder; one by one, friends, companions, children, parents, are taken from us; for a time, perhaps, we are "in a strait betwixt two," as was the apostle, not deciding altogether whether it is better to depart; but shall we not, at length, say with the disciples, when some dearer friend is taken, "let us go and die with him?"

The dead have not ceased their communication with us, though the visible chain is broken. If they are still the same, they must still think of us. As two friends on earth, may know that they love each other, without any expression, without even the sight of each other; as they may know though dwelling in different and distant countries, without any visible chain of communication, that their thoughts meet and mingle

together, so may it be with two friends of whom the one is on earth, and the other is in heaven. Especially where there is such an union of pure minds that it is scarcely possible to conceive of separation; that union seems to be a part of their very being; we may believe that their friendship, their mutual sympathy, is beyond the power of the grave to break up. "But ah! we say, if there were only, some manifestation; if there were only a glimpse of that blessed land; if there were, indeed, some messenger bird, such as is supposed in some countries to come from the spirit land, how eagerly should we question it!" In the words of the poet, we should say,

> "But tell us, thou bird of the solemn strain,
> Can those who have loved, forget?
> We call—but *they* answer not again—
> *Do* they love, do they love us yet?
> We call them far, through the silent night,
> And they speak not from cave nor hill;
> We know, we know, that their land is bright,
> But say, do they love there still?"

The poetic doubt, we may answer with plain reasoning, and plainer scripture. We may say, in the language of reason, if they *live* there, they love there. We may answer in the language of Jesus Christ, "he that liveth and believeth in me, shall never die." And again; "have ye not read," saith our Saviour, "that which was spoken unto you by God, saying, I am the God of Abraham, and the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob? God is not the God of the dead, but of the living." Then is it true, that they live there; and they yet speak to us. From that bright sphere, from that calm region, from the bowers of life immortal,

they speak to us. They say to us, "sigh not in despair over the broken and defeated expectations of earth. Sorrow not as those who have no hope. Bear, calmly and cheerfully, thy lot. Brighten the chain of love, of sympathy—of communion with all pure minds, on earth, and in heaven. Think, Oh! think of the mighty and glorious company that fill the immortal regions. Light, life, beauty, beatitude, are here. Come, children of earth! come to the bright and blessed land!" I see no lovely features, revealing themselves through the dim and shadowy veils of heaven. I see no angel forms enrobed with the bright clouds of eventide. But "I hear a voice, saying, write, blessed are the dead who die in the Lord, for they rest—for they rest, from their labours, and their works—works of piety and love recorded in our hearts and kept in eternal remembrance—their works do follow them." Our hearts—their workmanship—do follow them. We will go and die with them. We will go, and live with them forever!

Can I leave these meditations, my brethren, without paying homage to that religion which has brought life and immortality to light; without calling to mind that simple and touching acknowledgment of the great apostle, "I thank God through our Lord Jesus Christ." Ah! how desolate must be the affections of a people, that spurn this truth and trust! I have wandered among the tombs of such a people; I have wandered through that far-famed cemetery, that overlooks from its mournful brow, the gay and crowded metropolis of France; but among the many inscriptions upon those tombs, I read scarcely one—I read,—to state so striking a fact with numerical exactness—I read not more than

four or five inscriptions in the whole Pere La Chaise, which made any consoling reference to a future life. I read, on those cold marble tombs, the lamentations of bereavement, in every affecting variety of phrase. On the tomb of youth, it was written that "its broken hearted parents, who spent their days in tears and their nights in anguish, had laid down here their treasure and their hope." On the proud mausoleum where friendship, companionship, love, had deposited their holy relicts, it was constantly written "Her husband inconsolable;" "His disconsolate wife;" "A brother left alone and unhappy" has raised this monument; but seldom, so seldom that scarcely ever, did the mournful record close with a word of hope—scarcely at all was it to be read amidst the marble silence of that world of the dead, that there is a life beyond; and that surviving friends hope for a blessed meeting again, where death comes no more.

Oh! death!—dark hour to hopeless unbelief! hour to which, in that creed of despair, no hour shall succeed! being's last hour! to whose appalling darkness, even the shadows of an avenging retribution were brightness and relief—death! what art thou to the Christian's assurance? Great hour of answer to life's prayer—great hour that shall break asunder the bond of life's mystery—hour of release from life's burden—hour of reunion with the loved and lost—what mighty hopes, hasten to their fulfilment in thee! What longings, what aspirations,—breathed in the still night, beneath the silent stars—what dread emotions of curiosity—what deep meditations of joy—what hallowed imaginings of never experienced purity and bliss—what possibilities shadowing forth unspeakable reali-

ties to the soul, all verge to their consummation in thee! Oh! death! the Christian's death! what art thou, but the gate of life, the portal of heaven, the threshold of eternity!

Thanks be to God—let us say it, Christians! in the comforting words of holy scripture—"thanks be to God who giveth us the victory, through our Lord Jesus Christ!" What hope can be so precious as the hope in him? What emblems can speak to bereaved affection, or to dying frailty, like those emblems at once of suffering and triumph, which proclaim a crucified and risen Lord; which proclaim that Jesus the Forerunner, has passed through death, to immortal life? Well, that the great truth should be signalized and sealed upon our hearts in holy rites! Well, that amidst mortal changes, and hasting to the tomb, we should from time to time, set up an altar, and say, "by this heaven-ordained token, do we know that we shall live forever!" God grant the fulfilment of this great hope—what matter all things beside?—God grant the fulfilment of this great hope, through Jesus Christ!

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